HULK #1 COMIC OFFER!

MUST-HAVE COLLECTOR'S ISSUE!

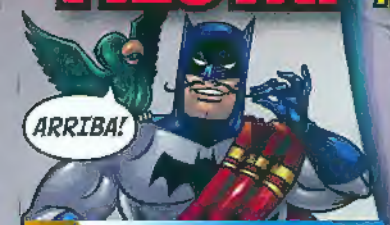
WIZARD®

Greg Horn

X-MEN 2
MOVIE ISSUE

"THIS IS MY 'EMPIRE STRIKES BACK'"
—Director Bryan Singer

APRIL FOOL'S FIESTA!
We've Gone Plumb Loco!

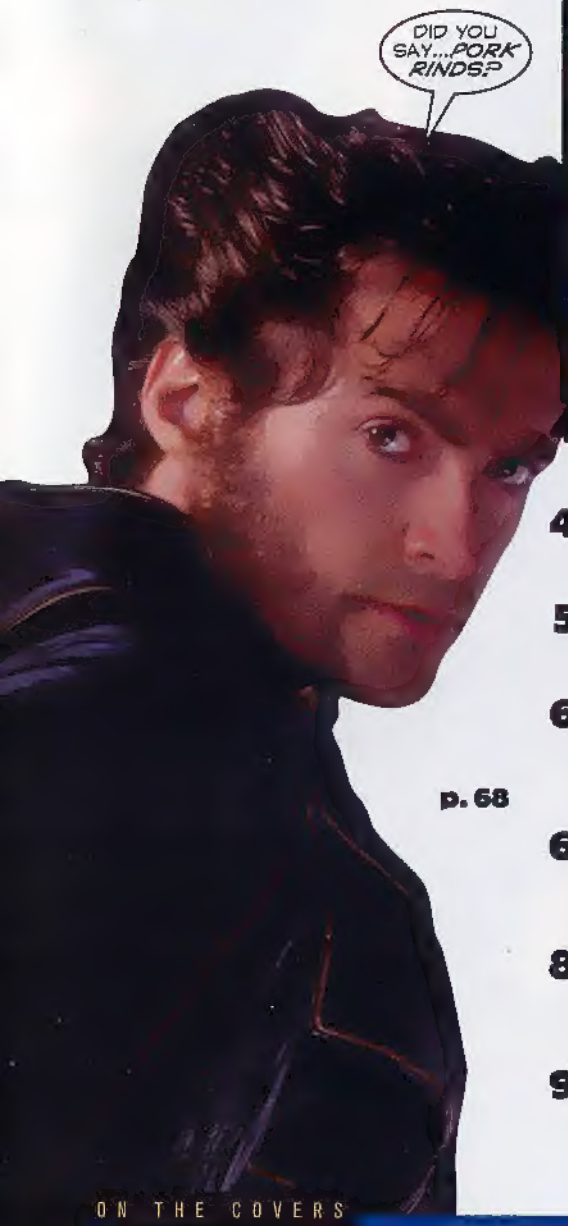


Storm (left) and Cyclops

X2 COLLECTOR'S COVER 2 of 3
WIZARDUNIVERSE.COM · MAY 2003
THE COMICS MAGAZINE · 140

WIZARD contents

THE COMICS MAGAZINE • NUMBER 140 • MAY 2003



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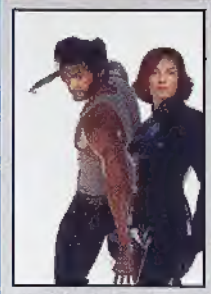

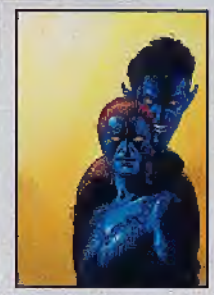

The **Wolverine/Jean Grey** movie cover (**left**) is courtesy of 20th Century Fox and Marvel Films. The **Nightcrawler/Mystique** cover (**center**) was drawn by Frank Quitely and Hi-Fi Design. The **Storm/Cyclops** cover (**right**) was rendered by Greg Horn. For our "X-Men 2" movie payoff coverage, check out the features starting on **page 66**!

X-MEN 2 COVER AND THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY FOX.

LADY DEATH: MAIDEN OF VIRTUE... BENDIS' HEAD EXPLODES... ...AND SPRITE VS. NIGHT TRAIN!

I can't explain why, but once every three or four months, we get a "Magic Words" mailbag filled with merry missives from comic potentates and cognoscenti. Nay, no mere refuge for übergeeks and dateless wonders, this! We have psychology experts! Business planners! Canadians!

Go gaze on in wonderment, gentle reader. And find out just why Chaos! Comics had to file for bankruptcy. At least according to one guy...

Dear Jim, Wizard, et al.,

I'm quite sad about the closing down of Chaos! Comics, and concerned about creator Brian Pulido's plans to publish a revamped *Lady Death* under the CrossGen Comics' "Code 6" label.

From reading *Wizard* articles, my understanding is that Mr. Pulido does not know why Chaos! Comics' core titles failed to get fans to buy anymore. I stopped buying Chaos! titles, once my favorites, because their storylines became so misaligned in ideological theme from their beginnings. Originally, the titles' positive soul inspiration and message of hope made me—a Christian!—proud to buy Chaos! titles.

I have completed a 12-part study on 14 comic book companies' core ideologies, and how it is attributed to a title's historical success. My study is based on the business study model documented in the excellent book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras. If Mr. Pulido plans to revamp the Lady Death storyline in a direction not aligned to the original and historically successful direction that inspired hope and triumph over evil in a person's soul, then I am concerned. I ask Mr. Pulido to please consider doing a retro-realignment, similar to the original storyline. That way, historical fans such as me will be inspired to buy for the long term.

My study is available for free by written request to:
Derek McIver
c/o Jean O. DeCatur
3647 Broadway, #5C
New York, NY 10031-2507

Derek McIver
New York, NY

Now there's something you don't see every day. Most letters we get are along the lines of "Who would win a fight between Gambit and Batman?" Therefore, most of my replies are along the lines of "I don't give a sack of wet crap."

Anyhoo, Brian Pulido does care. "I appreciate your concern over the new *Lady Death* direction, and I think you might be satisfied," he says. "She is clearly 'good,' fighting evil. Give it a read."

But Pulido does take exception to one of your characterizations. "Not to be a hard-ass, but are we talking about the same comics when it comes to your 'positive soul inspiration' statement?" Pulido asks. "Back in the day, Lady Death and Evil Ernie wanted the complete annihilation of the human race, Purgatori was a blood-crazed vampire, and Chastity was an assassin for hire. 'Message of hope,' you say? The intention back then was to make over-the-top outlaw comics that crazed fans across the globe would crave as a dark alternative to capes and spandex. The new Lady Death will be different yet again, but not in the way you saw her the first time."

PHOTO: PAUL SCHEER

BUNNY AWARD

Dear Jim,

Speaking of hot '80s licenses, I just purchased the "My Little Pony" license for $17.95 Canadian. How do I get the bigwigs at Dreamwave to (*ahem*) "pony" up some major cash for the comic book rights? I can see it now—*My Little Pony vs. The Transformers*! Now *that's* nostalgia, baby!

Jergen Margetts
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

$17.95 Canadian? Isn't that, like, 85 cents U.S.? If so, you wasted your money.

***My Little Pony vs. The Transformers*? Boy, Strawberry Shortcake is gonna feel so left out.**

Then again, slap her in spandex and get J. Scott Campbell to draw her, and...ah, never mind.

Dear Wizard,

It is hard to believe that I have been reading comics my entire 14-year life! I think I know more about mainstream comics than the average Joe, but after skimming through a few of my old *Wizard* magazines, I realized one thing: I don't know jack!

There were so many things that happened way before my time that I've never even heard of. So I made a small list of the most perplexing questions. If you can find the time, perhaps you can help fill in the blanks for me, and many of your other readers as well.

1) Who is Miracleman? I am aware that it was written by Alan Moore, but that's about it. Why do I seem to hear so much high praise from it, and is it still published?

2) What is *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and why are all DC timelines labeled pre- or post-*Crisis*?

3) I am interested in exploring titles outside the boundaries of my current walls, but I always get discouraged when I pick up a book and find myself confused with a ton of names and terms that I have not been properly introduced to. What are some titles you can recommend that don't need an introduction, or explain themselves to new readers?

4) I am an avid reader of *Spawn*, but for some reason, new issues have been very late. Why? And could this mean that a cancellation is imminent?

Sarou Armstrong
Brooklyn, NY

Good idear. I think from time to time we all take for granted that not everyone may be up to speed. Here's your four-part primer.

1) *Miracleman* was the U.S.-published version of the British character Marvelman. *Miracleman* first appeared in the U.S. in 1985, published by Eclipse Comics. The title was in the middle of a legal fight before it even reached U.S. shores. Quite naturally, Marvel Comics took exception to a character called "Marvelman," so a name change was necessary right off the bat.

The book itself was basically an homage to Captain Marvel—you know, DC's "Shazam!" guy—with characters that closely resembled the Marvel Family. Alan Moore wrote early, action-packed issues, and Neil Gaiman picked up the baton later. So yeah—"high praise" is usually what you hear about the book.

Things got even funkier in the '90s when Eclipse went bankrupt. Todd McFarlane Productions bought the Eclipse character library, but legal disputes between TMP and Gaiman kept the property in limbo. Gaiman recently won a court battle against McFarlane, but McFarlane is appealing. Twenty-four issues of *Miracleman* were published. If and when Gaiman gets publishing rights, he plans nine new issues to finish off the series.

2) *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was a 12-issue DC miniseries from 1985-86 that "cleaned up" DC's continuity. Instead of divergent realities such as Earth-1 (which housed the modern heroes of the JLA and others), Earth-2 (home of the Golden Age heroes JSA), and Earth-Monkey (home of, uh, monkeys), all DC storylines were streamlined into a single timeline on one Earth. Some new rules and revamped characters were introduced via the series, which is why you occasionally see references to pre- or post-*Crisis*.

3) Marvel is getting much better with their new intro pages. In particular, *Punisher* is bone-simple: Crazy guys shoot things. That's all you need to know.

4) Todd McFarlane (see "Miracleman" above) is a rather stubborn fellow who likes to dig in his heels and stand his ground. *Spawn* fell behind on scheduling many years ago, but McFarlane refuses to skip listing new issues for a few months to allow the title to "catch up." *Spawn* still comes out regularly—it's just that the issue solicited for the month is nowhere near the issue that *actually* comes out that month.

HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

ANTARTIC PRESS
7272 Wurtzbach, Suite # 204
San Antonio, TX 78240

BLACK BULL ENTERTAINMENT
PO Box 118
Congers, NY 10920
E-mail:
blackbullmail@aol.com

CROSSGEN COMICS
4023 Tampa Road,
Suite #2400
Oldsmar, FL 34677
www.crossgen.com

Dear Givers Of Monthly Comic Knowledge,

I come from the Great White North bearing questions and comments.

1) Do Wizardites watch hockey, and if so, who is your favorite team?

2) When is Brian Michael Bendis' head going to explode?

3) Congrats to Team Red Star for coming back after a long hiatus with such a wicked issue in *Red Star Annual* #1. Kudos to them, don't you agree?

4) Does Marvel have any plans to release an Ultimate Marvel Sketchbook? One with art from all kinds of creators and Ultimate redesigns that were left on the cutting room floor?

Dieter Friesen
beastx@hotmail.com

1) I'm from Minnesota, which kinda makes me a South Canadian. So yes, I've lost my bloody Chicklets across several frozen ponds and skated 'til my blisters burst with blood. Call me a fan of the Minnesota Wild.

2) About 20 minutes ago.

3) Yes, kudos indeed. A fast-paced, thrilling issue.

4) Nope.

Dear Wizard,

I really enjoy your magazine, but it's starting to bore me. I don't like seeing creators take something very cool, and turn it into something that looks like a comic book for little kids. Drawings of the X-Men by a Japanese animator? They just look skinny and weird. And I don't like *Ultimate Spider-Man* because it makes Spider-Man look like a little boy.

You should stick to the great comic books from Marvel and DC.

Luis Flores
North Hollywood, CA

Right now, I think the Powers That Be at Marvel and DC are determining just what the great comic books from Marvel and DC *will be* for the next decades.

Y'see, from a publishing and monetary perspective—and please make no mistake, it's *all* about the filthy lucre—comics are at something of a crossroads. Publishers see that anime is all over TV, "Yu-Gi-Oh!" cards are bigger than anything, and let us not forget that the U.S. was almost conquered by Pikachu a couple years ago. Therefore, skinny weird Japan-esque drawings that "look like a comic book for little kids" could equal cold, hard cash.

And, face facts—*every* business needs new blood, both on a consumer level and an industry level. If anime is all the rage, shouldn't comics cater to that? And is it the "fault" of Marvel or DC that the new wave of talent coming in to comics was reared more on "Voltron" cartoons than Neal Adams comics?

I think it's no mere coincidence that your letter also coincides with the launch of Marvel's manga-influenced "Tsunami" wave. Comics are at a crossroads, and the success or failure of things such as "Tsunami" may influ-

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QUICK HITS

THE READERS STRIKE BACK!

I can't believe DC isn't printing fan letters anymore. That sucks. It was such a personal touch in the comics.

—Anthony Burns, Waipahu, HI

The article on Hellboy was great this month [*Wizard* #138], but why wasn't he on the cover? Quit using Spider-Man every month!

—Dustin Stewart, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The new Avengers designs by Olivier Coipiel look incredible! For the first time ever, Warbird has a costume that reflects her name!

—Ben Ebert, benfrost@uclink4.berkeley.edu

Your Daredevil Checklist [*Wizard* #138] kicks ass! I collect a lot of my books by character appearance, so this is very helpful.

—Scot Atom Morrison, atomgogo@hotmail.com

Ultimate DC? I say go for it. And how about a DC manga universe? I bet Adam Warren could pull it off.

—Jomo Powell, Oakville, Ontario, Canada

Read the *Wizard* #138 Kia Asamiya article. I had to laugh. Marvel is ignoring all the bad feedback, and has deluded itself into thinking it made a wise decision with this artist on *Uncanny X-Men*.

—Keith D. Aguilar, keithagu75@hotmail.com

I think someday, people will look back on Kia Asimaya's work on *Uncanny X-Men* as the first shot fired in a great comics revolution.

—Barron Chadwick, Myrtle Beach, SC

Rogues Galleries [*Wizard* #138]? There is only one! The Flash [below] has the best "Rogues Gallery"! They're actually called the "Rogues Gallery"!

—Charlie Parkim, Glendale, CA

Thank the comic gods! *Astro City*, at long last, is back!

—Matthew Jackson, Sonora, AZ

Are there still people crying about Marvel's "Ultimate" line? I hope not. Don't they know *Ultimate Spider-Man* is the best book Marvel has done in the last decade?

—Phil Davidson, Groton, CT

Hey, thanks for the constant view-of-the-new in "Secret Stash." I always find something good there, *The Interman* [*Wizard* #138] in particular.

—Gary Stone, Chicago, IL

Great to see Chris Bachalo doing great work once again in *Ultimate War*. He's been much missed at Marvel.

—Dean Vaughn, Austin, TX

Enough with *The Call*, already. Didn't Marvel already cancel this once? Why are they trying it again?

—Bruce Phang Chen, Flagstaff, AZ

ence where they go in the future.

Stay tuned—you just might get more of what you don't like.

Dear Wizard,

In *Wizard* #138, every issue of *Daredevil* went up in value in the Price Guide except *Daredevil* #249! Poor little *Daredevil* #249. That's the saddest thing I've seen in *Wizard* in a long time. I bet *Daredevil* #249 is hanging out with *Uncanny X-Men* #93 right now, trading sob stories.

So what happened?

Brendan Walsh
Chicago, IL

Obviously, *Daredevil* #249 didn't send in its payola check on time.

Hello,

Way back in *Daredevil* (vol. 1) #177, Daredevil's mentor, Stick, tells DD that the radiation that blinded him only briefly enhanced his senses, and that in actuality, his remaining senses are the same as everyone else's. He goes on to claim that Daredevil's celebrated "radar sense" is something that *everyone* has, but that most people never learn how to use it because they depend too heavily on their other senses.

Whatever happened to this rather interesting notion? Did subsequent writers just ignore this, or did Marvel decide to veto that change in the character after the issue came out?

Mike Carey
Peabody, MA

Like many, many, many things in comics, it was just ignored. Hey, it's not like you can tell a story with a nod to every last notion brought up in the 400-plus chapter plays that came previous on any given character.

But I must admit, I rather liked this idea. Call me weird, but I've always kinda "felt" it—a "radar sense," almost. Close your eyes, and I believe you can almost feel someone as they come closer to you. This always struck me as a nice real-world twist that I wanted to see played up as well.

Wizard,

You guys always go on about folks like Kaare Andrews and Alvin Lee, but what about the original American manga artist? You know—Adam Warren!

What's he up to these days?

Andy Pinkard
Whittier, CA

Adam Warren is up to something. But he ain't telling yet. "In addition to drawing the occasional cover, I've been doing some sporadic writing for comics, most recently an upcoming Psylocke story for *X-Men Unlimited* with pencils by Rick Mays," Warren says. "On the writing AND drawing front, I've just started work on an original, creator-owned sci-fi project for a Big Publishing Company...that won't be announced publicly for some time yet, it seems."

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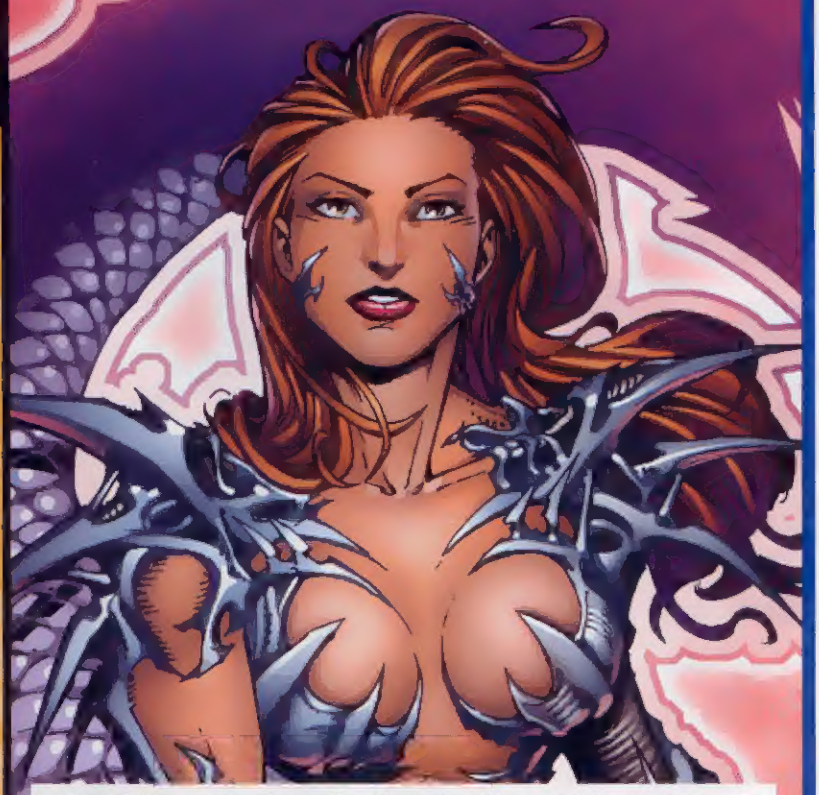
TALENT CONTEST UPDATE!



In *Wizard* #138, we asked aspiring pencilers, inkers and colorists to take their shot at becoming Top Cow Productions' next superstar, and there's still time to make your comic book career dreams come true. Ambitious talents can visit **TopCow.com** and download scripts to draw, penciled pages to ink or penciled and inked pages to color. One penciler, inker and colorist will win a six-month internship at Top Cow Productions in Los Angeles, where they'll work side by side with Top Cow's top artists, such as head honcho Marc Silvestri. In addition to the internship, all three winners receive a place to live, plus an airline ticket to get ya there! The three future comic book legends will also receive airfare and hotel accommodations to Wizard World Chicago 2003 (August 8-10, 2003), where they'll be introduced to the world as the contest winners at the Top Cow panel.

Please send us photocopies or digital files of your pencils, inks or colors (no originals please) to:

Become a Top Cow Superstar
c/o Wizard Entertainment
P.O. Box 118
Congers, NY 10920-0118

Dear Jim,

What does Jim Mahfood think of the new Sierra Mist drink? He's the best artist comics has to offer, and I want to know what he thinks of the drink that killed 7-Up.

Mike Reiff
Fredonia, NY

Food-One thinks it's actually closer to another well-established sody-pop. "I tried Sierra Mist once and I thought it tasted a lot like Sprite," he says.

Not that you should take his word for it. "I'm really not much of a soft drink person," Mahfood admits. "*My* beverage of choice is Night Train."

Mahfood and Fred Sanford both.

Dear Wizard,

I was wondering: When is the next comic convention coming to Phoenix, AZ?

Gerald McDowell
Phoenix, AZ

Sunday, April 13 at the Glendale Civic Center in Glendale, AZ. I'll be there, drinking Sierra Mist.

Dear Wizard,

How many pencilers work in the American comic book industry? I'm trying to gauge the odds of any one artist breaking into the field.

Michael Alan
B.A. in Psychology
mikeyalan@hotmail.com

I'd guesstimate about 600 active comic pencilers. In a population of 400 million, that means comic pencilers are about a 150,000-to-1 shot.

More importantly, how many guys trot out the sheepskin and brag about their psych degree in letters to comic book magazines? I'd say you're one-in-a-billion there, Superego.

That's that. Damn, I gotta admit—I love getting that last word in. Ah, the advantages of print publishing. And I'll be back again to do it next month. Until then, I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin

You wouldn't like Jim McLauchlin when he's angry. Figuring out when you would like Jim McLauchlin is the hard part.

Send letters to:
Magic Words
151 Wells Ave.
Congers, NY 10920
or e-mail us at JMcLauch@aol.com

wizard

NEWS & NOTES

ALL THE NEWS WE FELT LIKE PRINTING

AN EPIC LAUNCH AT MARVEL

Want to work for Marvel? New creator-owned line may be the ticket

X-TRA CASH You too could write a Wolverine comic and get paid $8,000.

"American Idol" isn't the only place to become a star.

Beginning this summer, Marvel Comics will relaunch its Epic line, giving comic pros, as well as novices, the chance to publish stories.

Described as Marvel's version of HBO's talent search "Project Greenlight," the imprint will allow new talent to receive their first break in comics, according to Marvel President Bill Jemas, while earning a paying gig.

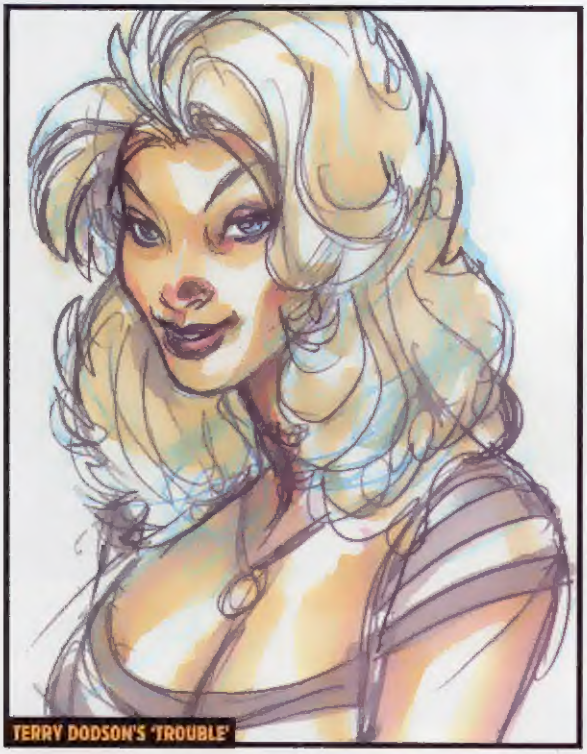
"The Epic model basically asks the creative teams to form their own small groups, with a writer, artists and composite/letterer," explained Jemas. "Topics can be as wide ranging as the imagination as the creators. We have no problem if the creators can use Marvel characters in ways that don't duplicate the things we're doing in the Marvel Universe. I honestly don't have a problem if someone can sign up the rights to Star Wars III and wants to publish it under Epic—it's a wide-open imprint."

A full announcement on the Epic line, including information on where and how to send proposals, will be included in May's *Marville* #1.

The Ultimates writer Mark Millar, who's been a proponent of publishers seeking out new talent for years, said he jumped at the chance to work on the line when Jemas and Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada explained it to him over dinner in New York.

"This is a real chance to see print. It's really that simple," Millar claimed. "DC and Marvel honestly stopped looking at submissions when the market imploded seven years ago. It's been a horrible, horrible time for all the smart, new people trying to break into the business. When [Jemas and Quesada] said they were starting the comic book version of 'Project Greenlight' I was like, 'Thank God. It's about time somebody did this.'"

Millar and artist Terry Dodson (*Spider-Man/Black Cat*) will launch Epic's first new mini-series in June with *Trouble* #1, a



TERRY DODSON'S 'TROUBLE'

series that will deal with the kinds of topics mainstream Marvel books don't have the latitude to cover, including romance, sex and teen pregnancy.

"We really have to be as radical in our thinking here as Stan [Lee], Steve [Ditko] and Jack [Kirby] were back in the '60s," said Millar. "Just as Stan reinvented the superhero comic, Terry and I want to completely rewrite the romance comic. Yes, there's going to be plenty of boning and nudity and very pretty people running around, but I also want to add a level of sophistication to that sexuality and produce a story that's going to have people talking for the next 10 years."

While Marvel's relying on established talent as tent poles for Epic, Jemas said the focus of the imprint will be to discover and recruit new talent that might have been overlooked and to give them a financially sound way of publishing their first comic book work.

"When the creative team submits a comic book, they receive $8,000, which isn't bad—as opposed to deals at other publishers where you have to pay to cover printing costs," explained the Marvel president. "Marvel will cover the cost. If a book is successful—meaning it sells in the normal range that a Marvel book sells—it's very easy to get $6,000 to $8,000 worth of bonuses. Three or four guys, who are creative and administratively sound, can make a living or a decent part-time job being Epic writers."

Believing that there is a huge untapped talent pool going unused, Quesada is ecstatic Marvel's taking the big plunge.

"There are only so many J. Michael Straczynskis, Brian Michael Bendis and Grant Morrisons out in the world," challenged Quesada. "But there are more coming up and we want to make sure we're first to offer them the opportunity to work with us." ■ MIKE COTTON

THE ORIGINAL EPIC LINE

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Launched in 1982, Epic Comics was Marvel's first foray into creator-owned publishing, changing the comics landscape by thrusting such comics into the mainstream. Here are a few of Epic's most memorable publications.

EPIC ILLUSTARTED Launched two years before the Epic imprint, *Epic Illustrated* was the eventual springboard for the entire line. Marvel's answer to the wildly popular *Heavy Metal* magazine, *Epic Illustrated* boasted work such as John Byrne's "Last Galactus Story" and John Bolton's "Marada the She-Wolf." It became the perfect place to see your favorite comic book pros working on stories you'd never expect them to tell.

DREADSTAR Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar* became Epic's first ongoing series in November of 1982. Mixing high action, mature storylines and science fiction imagery, *Dreadstar* quickly became one of the first superhero books for a slightly older audience.

ELFQUEST The indy cult series by Wendy and Richard Pini had never been published in color before–that is until Epic reprinted it. Taking a chance on the series in 1985, Epic published a very successful, 32-issue run of this title about a tribe of elves.

GROO THE WANDERER Sergio Aragonés' Groo character was already popular in March of 1985, but with Epic's backing, the funny, goofy and sarcastic series made it out of the indy realm and into comic book form for a 120-issue run.

ALIEN LEGION With brutal, hardcore science fiction action, a cast of tough-as-nails alien soldiers and some serious bloodshed, *Alien Legion* put the epic in Epic Comics' storytelling. With two series, one in 1984 and another in 1987, *Alien Legion* stands today as one of Epic's most memorable titles, now being reprinted in trade paperback form by Checker Books. ■ MC

SPIDER-MAN'S ONE TO WATCH

'Spectacular' relaunch by Jenkins/Ramos hits in July with new #1

At Marvel these days, the rule of thumb is, if it ain't broke, don't fix it—just give it a new #1.

The *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* creative team of writer Paul Jenkins (*Inhumans*) and artist Humberto Ramos (*Out There*) swings over to *Spectacular Spider-Man* #1 and #2, both shipping in June. *Peter Parker* will be cancelled after June's issue #57.

According to Spider-Man Group Editor Axel Alonso, Marvel decided to give the creative team a new #1 to set the series apart from their work on *Peter Parker* as well as J. Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr.'s take on the Web-head in *Amazing Spider-Man*.

"The reason for the revamp is simple—the chemistry of Paul Jenkins and Humberto Ramos," gushed Alonso. "Rest assured, *Spectacular* will be a different book than *Peter Parker*. As for concrete details as to what makes this book different from, say, *Amazing*: It will be *the* place to see all those crazy characters from Spidey history."

Hot on the heels of the sizzling "Return of the Goblin" storyline from *Peter Parker* #44–#46, fans can expect classic Spider-Man villains Rhino, Vulture and Electro to pop up, as well as a five-issue Venom arc that kicks off the series.

"We're starting with a pretty cool Venom arc I think the fans will be excited about because it's turned out even better than the Goblin story," explained Jenkins. "What I think Venom represents is this infernal triangle. The suit in a way needs and wants Peter Parker and has always kind of rejected Eddie Brock. Eddie Brock hates Peter Parker and wants the suit to stay with him, and Peter Parker wants to save Eddie Brock and would reject the suit. It's a metaphor for addiction."

Jenkins, who added that Marvel wants to publish between 15 and 18 issues of *Spectacular* a year, revealed that *Batgirl* artist Damion Scott will take over art duties on the title when Ramos needs a break. Ramos said he'll welcome the help, but still expects to do his fair share of issues in 2003.

"That's a tough one, but I can do at least 10 books a year," said Ramos, adding that he already has identified his own wish list of villains. "I'd love to have the Sinister Six back, but pretty much any of those characters will make my year, since I grew up with them. So bring them all on!"

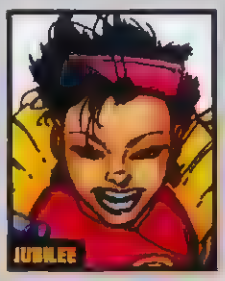
In addition to villains, one of the key players will be Spider-Man's former high school bully and sometime friend Flash Thompson, who'll find himself in need of his ex-punching bag.

"We have a real ongoing subplot with Flash," explained Jenkins. "In the Spider-Man story with the Goblin, Flash was paralyzed and basically lost his mind. And he's confined to a wheelchair, not because he can't walk, but because he's lost the ability to walk with his mind." ■ MC

PARKER CAN LOSE *Peter Parker* may be kaput but the creative team survives with a new *Spectacular Spider-Man* launch.

THE BUZZBIN

X-MARC'S DA' SPOT *New X-Men* writer Grant Morrison looks to be hitting his stride again after rumors swirled concerning missed deadlines. Morrison's already delivered his first script to Top Cow founder and artist Marc Silvestri for their planned X-Men collaboration that will see the future of the X-Universe in shambles.



NEW MUTANTS *Uncanny X-Men* writer Chuck Austen reveals that Jubilee will be the next "obscure" X-Men character to return to the pages of the title (following in the footsteps of Husk and Northstar).

SPEED DEMON The "B-Level" revivals continue at DC. The next benchwarmer to reportedly get a new look will be Etrigian the Demon, in an all-new miniseries written by Joshua Dysart (*Violent Messiahs*) with art by Pop Mhan (*SpyBoy*).

WOLVERINE: THE END? *Origin* writer Paul Jenkins is reportedly working on the last Wolverine story, the next in the series of "Last" stories from Marvel such as *Hulk: The End*.

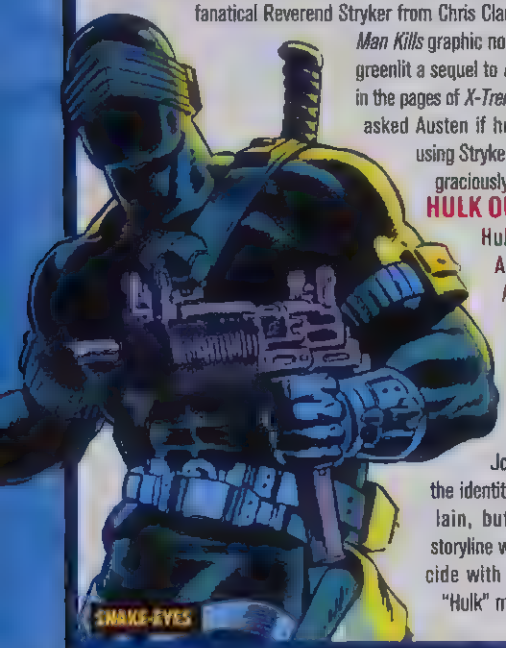
MORE MORRISON Superstar writer Grant Morrison has not one, but two new projects in the works for DC which should see stands by this fall, company sources indicate. One of the projects may involve a team-up with *New X-Men* artist Frank Quitely.

KING OF 'DA HILL Ever wonder what the Kingpin was like as a young thug? Well, writer Bruce Jones (*Hulk*) and artist Sean Philips (*Sleeper*) plan to let you in on the secret soon. Insiders at Marvel are comparing *Thug*, a new mini-series by the duo, to a "'Godfather'-like take on the Kingpin's origin."

X-CELEBRITY? Expect some major guest appearances in upcoming issues of *X-Statix* and we're not just talking comic types either! One of history's most recognizable celebrities (who died only recently) may play the role of a villain in an upcoming story, sources confirm.

YO JOE! Big plans are in store for Devil's Due/Image's *G.I. Joe*! Harkening back to the '80s, issue #21 will be a "silent" story starring Snake-Eyes, and fans can expect the return of the Joe's greatest menace–Serpentor–later this year.

MORE MUTANTS May's issues of *Uncanny X-Men* were originally planned to tie into the "X2" film. In fact, Chuck Austen was all set to bring back the fanatical Reverend Stryker from Chris Claremont's *God Loves, Man Kills* graphic novel. But after Marvel greenlit a sequel to *God Loves, Man Kills* in the pages of *X-Treme X-Men*, Claremont asked Austen if he could hold off on using Stryker in *Uncanny*. Austen graciously agreed.

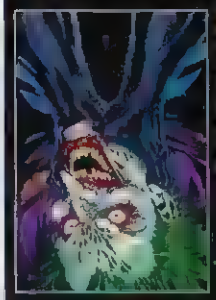


HULK OUT! After pitting the Hulk against the Abomination, *Incredible Hulk* writer Bruce Jones plans on bringing back another major supervillain in the immediate future. Jones wouldn't reveal the identity of the mystery villain, but teased that the storyline will be timed to coincide with the release of the "Hulk" movie. Hmmm...

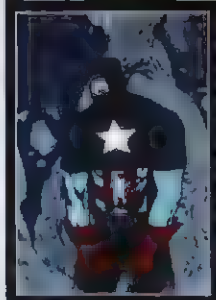
HOT READS

5 books we can't wait to pick up

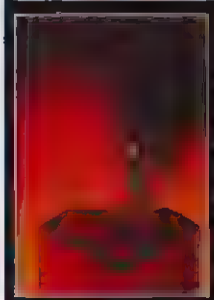
Every month at *Wizard*, our editors read hundreds of comic books. And like all fans, we get psyched about upcoming storylines and creative changes. Here are the five books that we're champing at the bit to read–and reasons why you should pick them up, too!



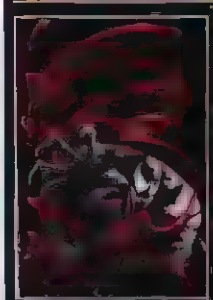
BATMAN #614 Batman's the superhottest thing in comics right now, nabbing the No. 1 spot on Diamond's Top 100 list for two months running. This ish serves up a moment fans have been salivating for ever since Jim Lee and Jeph Loeb took over the title: the Batman vs. the Joker showdown!



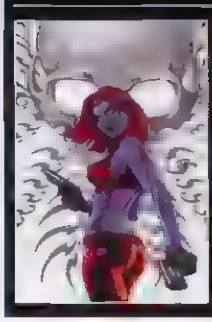
CAPTAIN AMERICA #12 Read the comic that everyone will be talking about this month! Wolverine, Hulk, Daredevil and Spider-Man have all had their origins tweaked or retold recently, and now it's Cap's turn with the "Ice" storyarc. It also features the ultra-stylized, eye-popping art of Jae Lee, who hasn't worked on a Marvel title since 2000's *The Sentry*.



SUPERMAN: RED SON We can't wait to check out Mark Millar's "Comrade of Steel" retelling of Superman's origin. With its great premise–instead of landing in Kansas, Superman crash lands in Russia during the height of the Cold War–and the Soviet versions of Lex Luthor and Batman bedeviling the Communist Superman, this story shows how much promise "Elseworlds" stories have when executed right.



VENOM #1 Daniel Way, the self-proclaimed "Kid Rock of comics," pens this new Tsunami title starring the psychopathic symbiote, so expect plenty of energy and attitude. This time around, Venom's other half, Eddie Brock, gets taken along for the ride, as the killer suit hops from host to host, which should keep the action fast and furious.

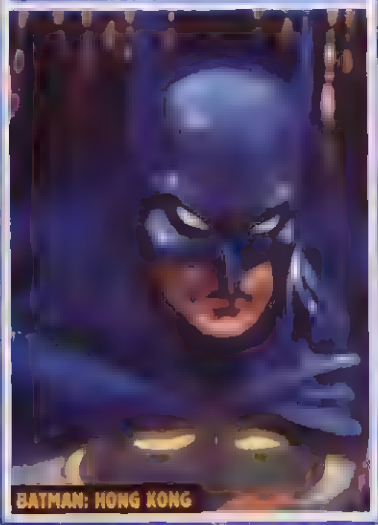


MYSTIQUE #1 Thanks to savvy writer Brian K. Vaughan (*Y–The Last Man*), this title's got a kick-ass espionage premise that makes the most of the ex-Brotherhood leader's shape-shifting abilities and cutthroat nature. Throw in solid art by *Black Panther* penciler Jorge Lucas, and titillating covers by Joe Linsner, and this book will shape-shift into high sales figures before long.

NEWSFLASHES

UPDATES AND RELEASES FROM AROUND THE INDUSTRY

GO EAST, BATMAN Batman vacates the mean streets of Gotham City for Hong Kong in June in an all-new hardcover graphic novel titled *Batman: Hong Kong*. Written and illustrated by legendary Hong Kong comics' creator Tony Wong, the story finds Batman investigating a mysterious crime organization terrorizing the Asian metropolis.



BATMAN: HONG KONG

WELCOME TO THE TERRA-DOME Straight from Alan Moore's *Tom Strong Adventures* comes *Terra Obscura*, an all-new, six-issue mini-series shipping in June written by Moore and Peter Hogan with art by Yanick Paquette from DC/ABC. Follow the continuing adventures of Tom Strong and the "other" Earth established in the pages of *Tom Strong* #12.

DC UNITED! Peter David (*Captain Marvel*) will author *The Fallen Angel* in July, as part of DC's effort to create a line that bridges the maturity gap between regular DC titles and the Vertigo line. *The Fallen Angel* will be drawn by Dave Lopez with covers by Mike Kaluta. David describes the title as "comic book noir that takes [illegible] of Casablanca and Gotham City by way of the Twilight Zone."

SOUL TO SOUL The creative team behind [illegible] (writer/illustrators Michael Avon Oeming and Miles Gunther) team up with *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola for an all-new Hellboy one-shot titled *B.P.R.D.: The Soul of Venice* from Dark Horse Comics. Shipping in May, *Venice* finds the bizarre characters of the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense investigating a strange occurrence within the waterways of Venice, Italy—and wherever the B.P.R.D. show up, grotesque monsters and ghosts are certain to follow.

BOOK IT, MARVEL Barnes & Noble Books, the publishing arm of the largest book retail chain in the U.S., will publish paperback editions of five volumes of the *Marvel Masterworks* series in [illegible]

CHARACTER TO WATCH

JASON TODD

Nobody lives forever—just ask former Boy Wonder, Jason Todd.

After stealing hubcaps off the Batmobile before being adopted by Bruce Wayne, Robin *part deux* embarked on a whirlwind adventure that ended with the Joker bashing in his skull with a crowbar. DC fans signed off on the death wish, paying 50 cents a call for phone-in votes during 1988's "A Death in the Family" storyline (*Batman* #426–#429). Since then, the second Robin hasn't appeared as a living character—a 14-year span. But DC plans to up Todd's profile in 2003 by not resurrecting him, refusing to feature him in any comics and making sure he isn't given a one-shot or mini-series.

The hugely anticipated but nonexistent push for Todd's resurrection begins in Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's highly acclaimed *Batman* run with issue #615, where Todd won't show up and, in fact, won't even be referred to.

"No, Jason Todd is not going to be in any of my *Batman* scripts," hinted Loeb. "He's been dead for years—there's a new Robin. He's got his own book. Are you on drugs?"

While Loeb's keeping his nonexistent plans for the former Robin top secret, DC was a little more forthcoming about their plans for the decomposing teen.

"Please stop calling here," revealed a DC insider. "I'm just a f—ing intern, man."

HEAT INDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard*, and here's some cool things we read and saw this month.

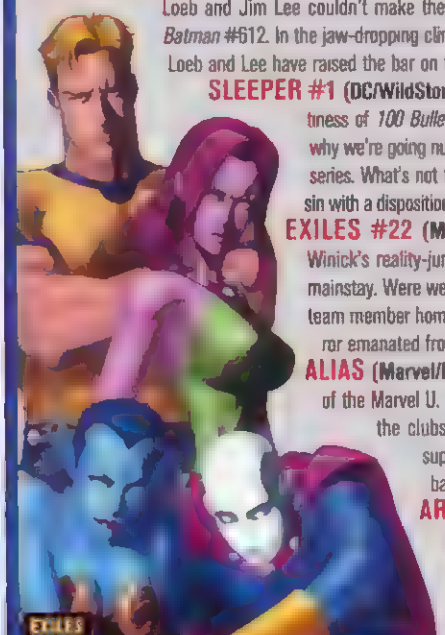
BATMAN #612 (DC Comics) The Krypto cameo not withstanding, just when we thought Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee couldn't make their *Batman* run any better, they hit us with *Batman* #612. In the jaw-dropping climax to the "Batman vs. Superman" storyarc, Loeb and Lee have raised the bar on the modern crossover!

SLEEPER #1 (DC/WildStorm) Take the world of *Powers*, mix in the grittiness of *100 Bullets*, throw in some strippers and you can see why we're going nuts over this all-new Ed Brubaker (*Catwoman*) series. What's not to love about Holden, a nigh-invincible assassin with a disposition that makes Dirty Harry look like a Girl Scout?

EXILES #22 (Marvel) No matter what happened in Judd Winick's reality-jumping *Exiles*, we could count on Blink as a mainstay. Were we wrong! The Timebroker shows up to send a team member home—and when Blink is banished, gasps of horror emanated from our office. The shock still hasn't worn off!

ALIAS (Marvel/MAX) This book exposes the dirtiest corners of the Marvel U. Case in point—the new drug trend sweeping the clubs where users inhale the fumes of burning superhuman flesh! Ugh—crack doesn't sound so bad all of a sudden.

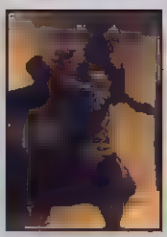
ART OF HELLBOY (Dark Horse) Mike Mignola's earned his rep as the artist's artist, and this 200-page tome features everything Mignola's done with his creation. A must-have for Mignola, Hellboy or art fans!



EXILES

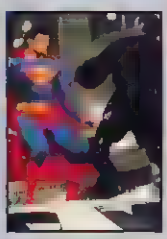
SEQUEL OPPORTUNITY

It's pretty much a no-brainer that "X2" is gonna be huge when it rolls out May 2. Heck, the first film grossed $157 million. Question is, will Bryan Singer's encore be the biggest box office sequel of all time? We pit the movie mutants against some of the highest-grossing sequels of the past, using a scale of one to 10 claws–the higher the claws, the more likely "X2" will slash the competition!



"BLADE 2" (2002)

Opening Weekend Gross: $32 million
Total Gross: $82 million
The Scoop: As one of the first Marvel film efforts that didn't completely suck, the vampire-slicin' "Blade" opened the door for more movie properties from the House of Ideas. And last year's sequel did even better than the original. But when it comes down to it, Blade is a second-tier character in a universe where the X-Men are king.
The Odds:

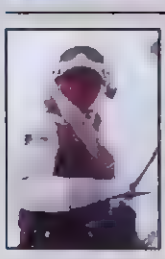


"SUPERMAN II" (1981)

Opening Weekend Gross: $14 million
Total Gross: $108 million
The Scoop: Props to Christopher Reeve, Richard Donner and company for putting superhero movies on the map–but "X2" has 20 years of movie-making evolution on its side. While "Superman" made us believe that a man could fly, "X2" will convince us a man can teleport or shoot blasts of ice from his hands.
The Odds:

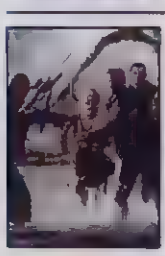
"BATMAN RETURNS" (1992)

Opening Weekend Gross: $45 million
Total Gross: $162 million
The Scoop: Hard rubber suits may have worked in the '90s, but these days, it's all about leather. While Tim Burton's take cornered the market on dark, edgy anti-heroes, the X-Men redefined superhero cool for a hip, modern audience. Plus, Batman's movie return never reached the popularity of the first go-around.
The Odds:



"THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK" (1980)

Opening Weekend Gross: $4.9 million
Total Gross: $209 million
The Scoop: In "Empire," Darth Vader leads a fleet of well-armed Star Destroyers against Luke's scattered Rebellion. In "X2," General Stryker leads a team of well-armed mercenaries against Xavier's scattered students. We hate to admit it, the Dark Lord of the Sith is a helluva lot more scary than an aging army stiff.
The Odds:



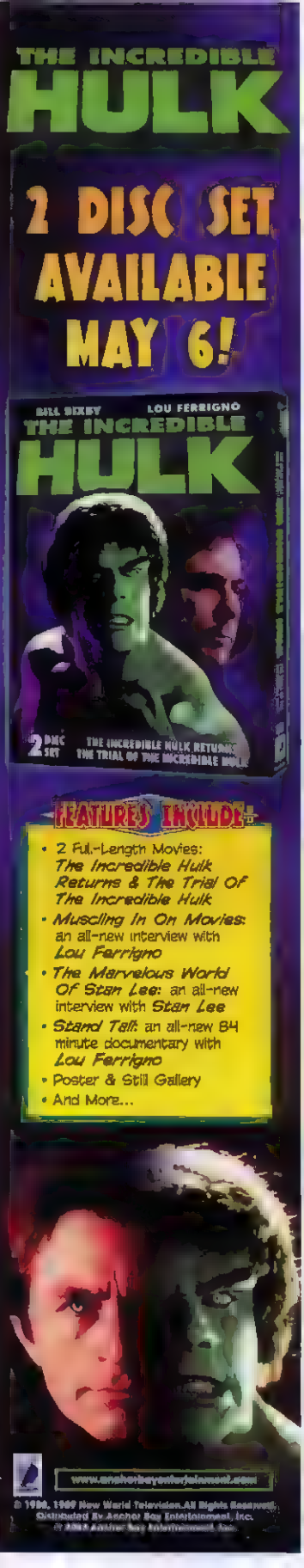
"THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK" (1997)

Opening Weekend Gross: $90 million
Total Gross: $229 million
The Scoop: Rampaging dinosaurs are for sissies. Rampaging mutants are the wave of the future! "The Lost World" may have delighted audiences with new stegosauruses and pterodactyls, but "X2" will blow moviegoers away with new mutants. Besides, we'll take Wolverine in a scrap against a velociraptor any day.
The Odds:

"LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS" (2002)

Opening Weekend Gross: $62 million
Total Gross: $325 million and counting
The Scoop: Oooh, this one's tough. Both films feature kick-ass fight scenes, compelling conflicts and strong ensemble casts. Heck, both even star Ian McKellan! How do you choose? How about a steel-cage match between Nightcrawler and Gollum–we're bettin' the fuzzy elf bamfs all over the slimy cretin. "X2"'s got a tough climb if it's gonna scale the Two Towers.
The Odds:

Blade 2 & The Two Towers: New Line Cinema. Superman 2 & Batman Returns: Warner Bros. The Lost World: Universal Studios.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• Poster & Still Gallery
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FLASHESCont.

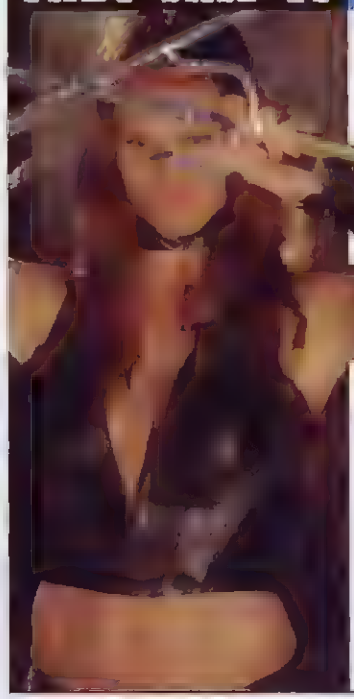
April. Although Marvel published paperback versions of the first *Spider-Man Masterworks* collection in 1992 and the first *Avengers Masterworks* in 1993, the series has otherwise remained in its pricy hardcover format at $49.95. The Barnes & Noble editions have a cover price of $12.95. The five *Masterworks* volumes that B&N will exclusively publish include the first volumes for *Spider-Man, Daredevil, The Incredible Hulk, X-Men* and the *Fantastic Four*.

WHAT'S YOUR SIGN, BABY? Writer Keith Giffen (*Justice League International*) teams up with penciller Colleen Doran (*Orbiter*) for an all-new ongoing series titled *Reign of Zodiac* from DC Comics. Kicking off this June, *Zodiac* brings the mystical characters of your daily horoscope to life as they partake in a war of truly mythical proportions.

SEND IN THE CLONES Here it is, Star Wars fans! The first chapter of the epic Clone Wars kicks off this June from Dark Horse Comics in this massive, 128-page graphic novel titled *Star Wars: Clone Wars Vol. 1: The Defense of Kamino* written by Haden Blackman and John Ostrander with art by Jan Duursema. In *Kamino*, two undercover Jedi discover a Separatist plan to destroy the cloning facility on the watery world of Kamino, thus crippling the Republic's ability to maintain their clone army. Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker are part of a Jedi fighter squadron sent to protect the installation, but they learn that there are heroes fighting for the Separatist cause as well as for the Republic, and that Jango Fett, though dead, still has something to say about how this war is fought! New characters and new worlds are revealed as the Clone Wars spreads throughout the galaxy!

BORN AGAIN *Punisher* writer Garth Ennis takes on the Punisher's origin in June in a four-issue mini-series from Marvel, entitled *Born*. Fans may be surprised by what Ennis—who's made his mark with over-the-top violent stories—reveals in this definitive origin story.

THEY SAID IT



"I wish that I had read *Elektra* when I was growing up because I think that **she's very empowering** to young women. I can't pass up the comics now; I have to stop and see if there's a new *Elektra* out."
–"Daredevil" star Jennifer Garner

PHILADELPHIA
WIZARD WORLD
COMICS · TOYS · ANIME · MANGA · GAMING · TV · MOVIES

IT'S A SMALL 'VILLE AFTER ALL IN PHILADELPHIA.

Allison Mack, the talented actress who plays Chloe Sullivan on the hit WB series "Smallville," will be one of the many special guests at Wizard World East in Philadelphia! Allison will be on hand to sign autographs and do the meet-and-greet routine with fans Saturday and Sunday as part of the three-day funfest that runs from May 30 to June 1, 2003 at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

And even if you're not a TV type, Wizard World East will also feature...

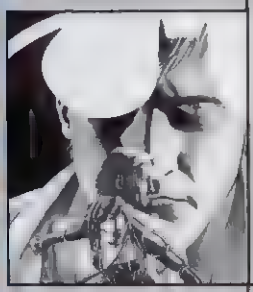
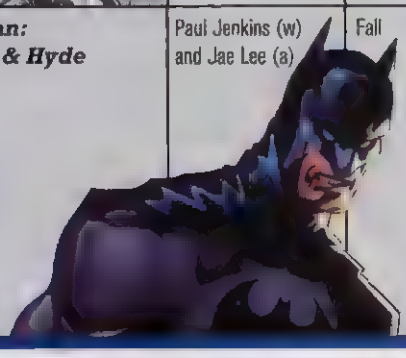
- Guests such as Alex Ross (*JLA: Liberty and Justice*), Frank Cho (*Liberty Meadows*), John Cassaday (*Planetary*), Greg Land (*Sojourn*), Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, and...the just-added Top Cow Productions founder Marc Silvestri!
- Yummy-mummy exclusives! Check out the "Tuxedo Bunsen & Beaker" from the white-hot Palisades Toys "Muppets" line, available ONLY at Wizard World East!
- Hundreds of dealers, oodles of exhibitors, great give-aways, informative panels and occasional fans in really weird-looking homemade Boba Fett costumes. It's a treat for all the senses!

TICKETS ($20 for 1 day, $40 for 3 days) can be purchased online at www.wizarduniverse.com.

KNIGHT ON THE TOWN

The Bat is back!

Not since the early '90s has DC's Dark Knight Detective been as popular as he currently is, thanks in part to Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's stellar run on *Batman*. Yet, rather than rest on its Bat-laurels, DC plans on hitting fans with a series of one-shots and mini-series by some of the industry's hottest creators. Here's what Bat-fans can expect to see later this year.

TITLE	CREATIVE TEAM	SHIPS IN	THE BAT-SCOOP	WHY YOU GOTTA CHECK IT OUT
Arkham Asylum: Living Hell	Dan Slott (w) and Ryan Sook (a)	May	Take the world of HBO's prison drama "Oz," mix in Batman's infamous Rogue's Gallery, and you've got *Living Hell*. When Warren White fakes insanity to skip a jail sentence and winds up in Arkham Asylum, he soon learns why no one ever cops an insanity plea in Gotham City. Now he's a "fish" in the most dangerous place in the DCU, and if he wasn't crazy before, he certainly will be by the end of this six-issue mini-series.	Thanks to the twisted writing of Slott (*Ren & Stimpy*) coupled with the art of Mike Mignola protégé Sook (upcoming artist on *Detective Comics*), *Living Hell* should prove to be the definitive story about Gotham City's haunting insane asylum.
Batman/Planetary: Night on Earth 	Warren Ellis (w) and John Cassaday (a)	June	Hot on the heels of last November's *Planetary/JLA: Terra Occulta* comes this all-new, Prestige Format one-shot that teams up the Dark Knight with the Archaeologists of the Unknown. In *Night on Earth*, the Planetary crew (Jakita Wagner, Elijiah Snow and The Drummer) heads off to Gotham City to investigate the mysterious urban legend known as the Batman, but they soon discover that Batman will go to any lengths to remain hidden.	Cassaday was reportedly so excited to take on the project that he put penciling *Planetary* #16 on the backburner so he could focus solely on *Night on Earth*. With Cassaday giving this project his full attention, coupled with a quartet of DC and WildStorm's coolest characters, it's clear that this will be one summer crossover you won't want to miss.
Batman: Jekyll & Hyde 	Paul Jenkins (w) and Jae Lee (a)	Fall	The creative team behind Marvel's *The Sentry* and *Inhumans* team up once again for this six-issue mini-series. *Jekyll & Hyde* journeys inside the twisted mind of Harvey Dent (a.k.a. Two-Face) and poses the question, "Who is more honest—the man who acknowledges his darker side, or the man who suppresses it?"	Judging from the success of *The Sentry* and *Inhumans*, *Jekyll & Hyde* should prove to be another hit for the dynamic duo of Jenkins and Lee. Plus, *Jekyll & Hyde* serves as Lee's first regular foray into the DCU (aside from "Our World at War" covers), and with his gritty/realistic art style, we're dying to see what he has in store for Gotham's resident schizophrenic psychopath.

CALL AN AUDIBLE 'CUZ HERE COMES A BAT BLITZ!

CGE READING PROGRAM BRIDGES THE GAP

CrossGen Entertainment isn't just in the business of making comics anymore—the publisher's also decided to build a few bridges.

Bridges—the title of CrossGen's supplemental reading comprehension program offered nationally in schools for grades 4-12—was designed by CrossGen and five teachers to bridge the gap between skilled and struggling readers. The program utilizes CrossGen's *Meridian* title for grades 4-8 and *Ruse* for grades 9-12.

"We want to teach reading but we also want try to instill and inspire an enthusiasm for reading," said CrossGen Vice President of Product Development Tony Panaccio.

The $490 program is already in use at a half dozen schools nationwide with plans to expand over the next few months. The program consists of a teacher's guide (both hard copy and CD-ROM), a one-year site license for unlimited reproduction of the guide's materials and 30 copies of either *Meridian* Travelers Trade Paperback #1 for elementary and middle school or *Ruse* Travelers trade paperback #1 for high school students. The program also includes a free subscription to a special Comics on the Web site built specifically for Bridges.

According to Bridges editor and former teacher Beth Widera, response to the program has been phenomenal. In fact, CrossGen is even planning a home school version of Bridges.

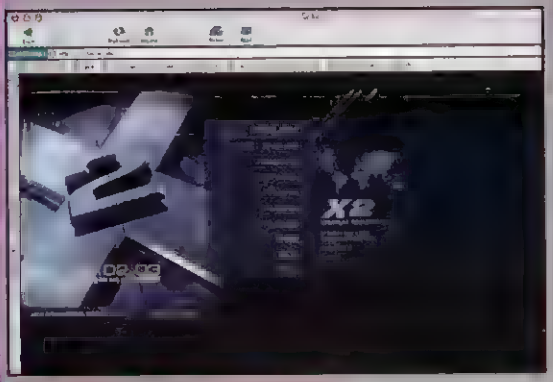
"This is going much better than I ever thought it would," Widera said.

"I never thought we'd get the kind of reaction we've received. And everyone wants more." ■ MC

dot.comics

COOL COMICS-RELATED STUFF ON THE INTERNET

SITE OF THE MONTH



THE OFFICIAL X2 MOVIE SITE

http://x2-movie.com

With "X2" right around the corner, the official X-Men movie site ranks as your one-stop source for all things X! Step into an awesome virtual Cerebro to explore the various areas of the site. Filled with up-to-the-minute news about the cast, crew and production, the site bursts with all sorts of mutant-themed features. View trailers, pics and wallpapers, check out a comprehensive slide show that explains the history of mutation, and download a countdown clock to tick away the seconds 'til May 2! There's even a link to the Mazda Website where you can drool over Cyclops' shiny new Mazda RX-8. And best of all, surfers can actually access Stryker's Mutant Database, a three-dimensional virtual space that you can navigate to find files on every mutant in the film!

APRIL

1 Happy April Fool's Day! Play a joke on someone you love. Check out this site to get some devious ideas: www.computerpranks.com

2 *Wolverine: Xisle* #1 (Marvel). Wolvie goes berserk at a carnival! Cool Wolverine fan site: www.wrathoftherunt.com/wotr4/Main.htm

11 "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" hits on DVD today. Official Potter homepage: http://harrypotter.warnerbros.com

16 *Beware the Creeper* #1 (Vertigo). New Vertigo mini-series from indy creator Jason Hall (*Pistolwhip*). Discover *Pistolwhip* at: www.pistolwhipcomics.com

23 *Powers* #31 (Image) Brian Michael Bendis explores the origins of the Powers! Get the scoop on Bendis' other projects: www.jinxworld.com

30 *Planetary* #16 (WildStorm). It's back! Elijah Snow and company returns to exploring the secret history of the 20th century. Comprehensive fan site: http://home.earthlink.net/~rkkman/frames/index.html

GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE MONTH

http://www.flowgo.com/greetings/dirty-baby/dirtybaby.swf

5 QUESTIONS WITH...

COLLEEN DORAN

Growing up a few miles from where the original Mercury astronauts trained, writer/artist Colleen Doran (*A Distant Soil*) jumped at the opportunity to pencil DC's hardcover one-shot *Orbiter*, the tale of a doomed space shuttle written by Warren Ellis (*Planetary*). However, after the Space Shuttle *Columbia* accident in February killed all seven astronauts aboard, *Orbiter* ran the risk of being shelved. DC decided to move forward with April's *Orbiter* launch, with a new foreword by Ellis.

How much research did you put into this project?

I've been a lifelong space program enthusiast. I've been collecting memorabilia since I was a little girl. I still have the "Man on the Moon" live broadcast album that my parents bought me when I was just a few years old. I grew up a few miles from Langley, where astronauts trained. Some of my best friends growing up were people that worked for NASA.

Where were you when you first heard about the Columbia?

I was doing the Creation Convention in Pasadena. Whoever was in the hotel room next to me never turned off his television and I didn't get any sleep. It was 6 a.m., and I was going, "I'm gonna kill this guy if he doesn't turn off the TV." I overheard the words "space shuttle" and "NASA." They never talk about the shuttle unless it's bad news. I just sat there for hours watching the news.

How did you react when you saw what was going on?

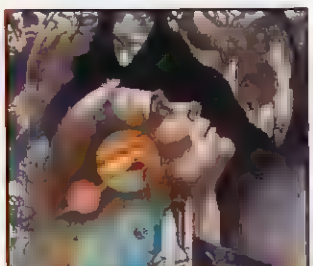
I just sat there with my mouth hanging open going, "Oh no, those poor people." I just thought, "Man, I hope it was quick." Then I thought, "Jesus, their families are waiting for them, I wonder if they even know?" It should've been the happiest day of their lives.

How important is Orbiter in lieu of what happened?

Orbiter is about that sense of wonder, about hope. People who enjoy their cable television and their Doppler radar weather and all these wonderful technologies–we take for granted these things came from space program research. People don't understand that the space program returns $3 to the economy for every $1 invested. I've never had any doubt since I saw the first broadcast from the moon, I just knew it was something wonderful and if I could understand that as a toddler, I don't understand why adults can't quite get it.

How important is Orbiter to you personally?

I was about 10 years old and an astronaut came to our school. He asked for questions, and I raised my hand and asked my question, then he's like, "Anybody else?" I raised my hand again, and did it over and over until somebody else raised their hand, and ya know what their question was? How do you go to the bathroom? I was asking about psychological tests, claustrophobia, training, G-forces–I was totally into this stuff. At that moment I knew that I got it. I ended up applying for the civilian space shuttle program when I was 20, and I could never pass since I have the world's worst eyesight. I just wanted to be an astronaut so bad when I was a kid, and I just hope that this book is inspirational.



Wolverine, 20th Century Fox

ADAM HUGHES CALLS FOR TOMB SERVICE

Babe artist trades in pen to write three-issue 'Tomb Raider' arc for Top Cow

Adam Hughes is trading in his drawing table for a keyboard. But only temporarily.

Starting with July's issue #32, the popular artist—known for his "good girl" renditions of famous comic babes—will swap pencil for pen as he crafts a three-issue Lara Croft tale in the pages of Top Cow's *Tomb Raider*.

The story ties into the thieving beauty's upcoming return to video games in Eidos Interactive's latest *Tomb Raider* release, *The Angel of Darkness*. In *Angel*, Lara finds herself framed for the murder of her former mentor, Werner Von Croy. To uncover the truth, she tracks a mysterious figure named Eckhardt to Prague's dark underworld, where the sinister Cabal is planning to re-awaken an evil power.

Hughes is an unabashed video game fan, so the project was right up his alley.

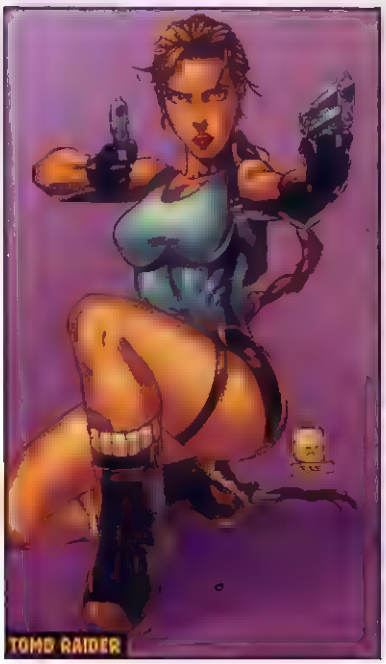
"Oddly enough, I steered clear of video games for most of my life," laughed Hughes. "And then about three years ago, somebody got me hooked on them—and like a fool, I jumped into them in my 30s!"

Not surprisingly, he's plenty familiar with Eidos' famous digital diva. "I've played all the *Tomb Raider* games," admitted Hughes. "And even before I was offered this project, I was very much looking forward to the new one."

Though Hughes is known mainly for his art, make no mistake: He's more than capable of handling words, with prior writing credits like the two-issue *Gen*[13]*: Ordinary Heroes* mini-series and the three-issue *Superman/Gen*[13] mini-series. In fact, Hughes was offered the *Tomb Raider* gig explicitly as a writer.

"When [Top Cow Editor-in-Chief] Jim McLauchlin offered me the project, he never even mentioned my artwork," said Hughes. Hughes' arc will be the first multi-issue story for new *Tomb Raider* artist Tony Daniel. After taking over the book with May's double-sized issue #30, Daniel gives way to guest penciler Pop Mhan for one issue before taking over the book for good with issue #32.

And hey, if you absolutely can't survive without your Adam Hughes art fix, the covers to the three issues will be drawn by the AH! man himself.



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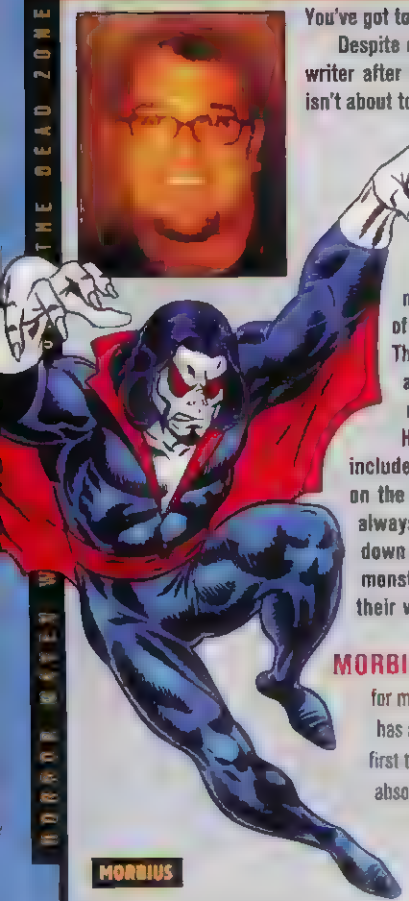
UPS tracking # e-mailed with each order
Worldwide shipping
New titles posted every Saturday morning

NILES OF THE LIVING DEAD

You've got to hand it to Steve Niles–he knows what he's good at. Despite claiming the title of the comic industry's #1 horror writer after the wild success of IDW's *30 Days of Night*, Niles isn't about to rest on his laurels. In 2003, the writer plans on hitting fans of ghosts and gore with two all-new horror series.

It all kicks off in May with *Calling All Monsters: A Cal McDonald Mystery* from Dark Horse. Starring Niles' creator-owned, monster-hunting detective, the five-issue mini-series shows the ugly (and we mean ugly) side of Hollywood, one filled with vampires and werewolves. Then, shipping this summer, fans can catch the highly anticipated sequel to *30 Days of Night* in an all-new mini-series titled *Dark Days*.

However, regardless of his workload (which also includes working with "Spider-Man" director Sam Raimi on the upcoming "30 Days of Night" feature film), Niles always wants to do more. *Wizard* had a chance to sit down with the superstar writer to see what other comic monsters he'd like to take a crack at–or at least change their wardrobe.



MORBIUS

MORBIUS: "As far as characters go, the biggest one probably for me is Morbius. I really feel like that's a character that really has an aspect to it that could be made very frightening, so the first thing I would do is probably get rid of the leotards. There's absolutely no reason in the world why, when he changes into a vampire, he's suddenly needs to be wearing spandex! He's constantly at odds with the humans and the monsters, and I think that really puts him in a unique place. Some great stories could be written from that."

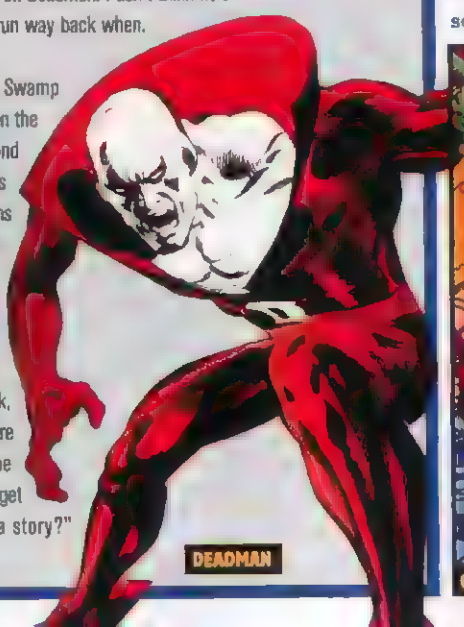
GHOST RIDER: "As far as Ghost Rider, I would love to do a total Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde take on his character–where his human form is one guy, but when he turns into Ghost Rider, he's a maniac. Not necessarily evil in any way, but I would love to see something like that done."

DC MONSTERS: "I'd love to get a chance on Deadman. I don't think he's been done quite as well as the Neal Adams run way back when. I'd also like to write the Patchwork Man."

SWAMP THING: "Unfortunately, I think Swamp Thing is almost untouchable, because between the [Bernie] Wrightson/Len Wein early version, and what Alan Moore did, I just don't think there's anything that can be done with it. Lately it seems like he's almost turned into an 'environmental monster,' so I'd like to revive the Wrightson aspect if I could."

SON OF SATAN: "I think some great things can be done with him. I just don't know about the cape, but obviously he'd bear that mark, that scar on his chest. I would lean him more towards 'The Omen.' The reluctance of the greatest evil that's ever existed–if you can't get a story out of that, where can you get a story?"

■ CASEY SELAS



DEADMAN

BUSIEK BAGS A BARBARIAN

Kurt Busiek didn't think he was the right man to take on Dark Horse's all-new *Conan* ongoing series.

Despite the fact that he'd been a lifelong fan of the bloodthirsty barbarian, coupled with his eagerness to take on a *Conan* project once it was leaked to him that Dark Horse had acquired the license, the veteran writer still had his doubts.

"When [Dark Horse Comics President] Mike Richardson told me that Dark Horse was getting the rights to the Conan license," explained Busiek, "the first thing I asked was, 'So, when are you guys gonna call Roy Thomas [writer of Marvel's 1970s *Conan the Barbarian*]?' I always thought Roy's *Conan* was the best in comics outside of [Conan creator] Robert E. Howard. Sometime later, I found out Roy wasn't writing it and they asked me, so I said sure, I'll compete with anyone else for it."

While Dark Horse hasn't set a release date for the monthly series (sources expect issue #1 to hit in late 2003/early 2004) and an artist has yet to be announced, Busiek already has a few ideas for the series.

"It's still a little early, but I can tell you that—and this is the order from on high and I don't disagree at all—if Robert E. Howard wrote it, it's canon, anything else other than that never happened," said Busiek. "Call this 'Ultimate Conan' if you want. This is going back to the original source material and building a new Conan series based on that foundation." ■ CS

CONAN

MEAN, GREEN TEAM-UP

Alien gangsters, drug runners take center stage in April crossover

GREEN ARROW AND GREEN LANTERN

What would it take to get Oliver Queen and Kyle Rayner to work together?

"Outer space, drug dealers and gangsters," laughed *Green Lantern* writer Judd Winick. That's the premise behind April's "Black Circle, Urban Knights," a six-part *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* crossover that revives one of the most classic team-ups in comics history.

"There's going to be plenty of action and adventure in this teaming up of two completely different people," promised *Green Arrow* scribe Ben Raab. "With all the legacy that the Green Lantern/Green Arrow partnership brings, we wanted to put a different wrinkle on it. The characters end up in this caper that requires them to work together to protect the world from an alien threat."

What kind of threat, you ask? "A syndicate of alien gangsters comes to Earth to set up some trade routes," explained Winick. "It's really action heavy, and it's got a lot of laughs."

Expect to see a detective slant to the story as well. "Who the godfather of this syndicate is will be a big mystery," teased Raab. "And there's going to be a couple of guest stars: Black Canary will eventually make an appearance, as will Connor, Jade and someone tied directly to Green Lantern that you might not expect. And no, it's not Sinestro!"

The legend of the emerald alliance goes back to the '70s, when Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams crafted the definitive run of Green Arrow/Green Lantern adventures. So how do Winick and Raab measure up? "It's a hard legacy to live up to," admitted Raab. "The original Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams run was groundbreaking, and there's no point in retreading broken ground. We just wanted to go in a direction of our own and have fun with it."

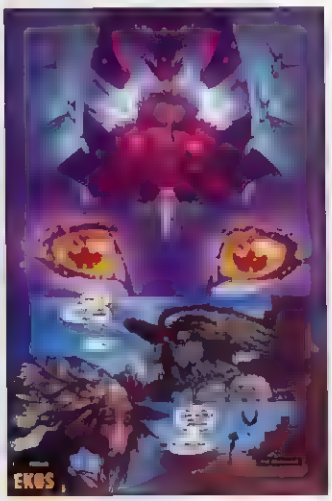
And as Winick pointed out, Ollie's relationship with the new GL, Kyle Rayner, will be a far cry from his relationship with Hal Jordan. "The person Ollie was closest to in the world, maybe even more so than Black Canary, was Hal Jordan," explained Winick. "So now he has to deal with this younger Green Lantern running around in his best friend's clothes."

The story alternates between the two titles with a new installment every week. "Which I just think is f—ing great! It's bam bam bam bam. You never get that in a monthly book!" Raab handles parts one, three and five in *Green Arrow* #23-25 while Winick scripts parts two, four and six in *Green Lantern* #162-164 (all six parts will be drawn by Charlie Adlard). The crossover will lead into each writer's new runs on the opposite title, as Winick jumps onto *Green Arrow* and Raab takes over *Green Lantern*. ■ RH

PICK MIKE TURNER'S NEXT PROJECT

There's still time to make your vote count.

If you missed the previews of *Fathom* creator Mike Turner's new projects—*Ekos* with writer Geoff Johns (*JSA, Avengers*) and *Dragonfly: Soulfire* with *Batman* writer Jeph Loeb—in *Wizard* #139, rush over to **www.wizarduniverse.com** and check out the two exclusive previews online for the first time. After you've had a chance to read each story, simply vote on which project you'd like Turner and company to tackle first. Then roll on over to Wizard World East in Philadelphia this May 30-June 1, where Turner and *Wizard* will announce the results of the vote, and what book he'll publish first. So what are you waiting for? Get on over to **www.wizarduniverse.com** and vote like you're not scared of jury duty! ■ MC



KUBERT UP FOR SALE

Adam Kubert has seen plenty of his artwork and comics auctioned off during his career. However, this is the first time he has agreed to auction himself off.

Ultimate X-Men artist Kubert will auction his services for a one-day comic store appearance on May 3 anywhere in the continental U.S. The appearance coincides with the "X-Men 2" film on May 2 and Free Comic Day May 3.

The Marvel Comics exclusive artist will donate auction proceeds to the National Childhood Cancer Foundation. The event will be co-sponsored by *Wizard* and Dynamic Forces. The 10-day auction will be held on **ebay.com** from March 28-April 6 (beginning and ending at 11 p.m. EST).

"With the X-Men sequel and Free Comic Day, this seemed like a great opportunity to create more awareness for the comics industry and raise some money for charity in the process," said Kubert, a mainstay on *Wizard*'s Top 10 Artists list and teacher at the Joe Kubert School.

FCBD will include a version of Kubert's *Ultimate X-Men* #1, which Kubert will sign at his store appearance, in addition to the *Wizard X-Men Special* which features artwork by both Adam and Andy Kubert. Dynamic Forces will also offer signed versions of *Ultimate X-Men* #1 on their Website and donate proceeds to NCCF. For details, visit **ebay.com**, **wizarduniverse.com** or **dynamicforces.com**. ■ MC

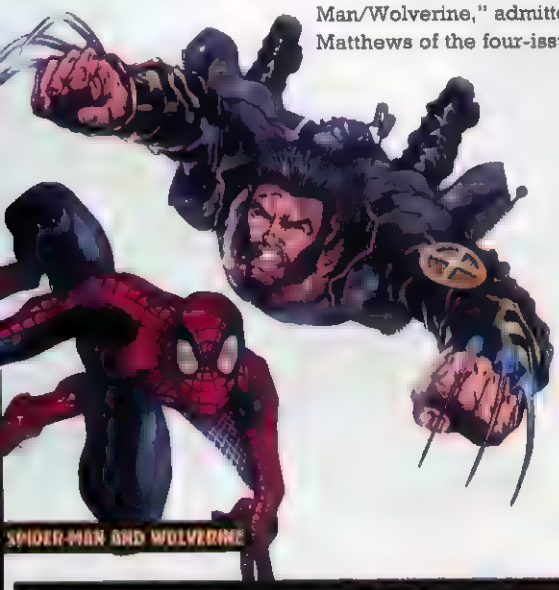
MARVEL'S TOP DOGS RUN WILD

When Spidey and Wolverine team up in June, which Marvel superstar headlines the show?

When it comes to Wolverine and Spider-Man, it's getting harder and harder to decide which hit character gets top billing.

Just ask Brett Matthews (*Spider-Man/Daredevil*), who's writing the new *Wolverine/Spider-Man: Stuff of Legends* mini-series.

"You know, on all the scripts, it's Spider-Man/Wolverine," admitted Matthews of the four-issue Marvel Knights mini-series planned for June. "With the 'X-Men 2' movie coming out, who knows which way it'll go, right?"



With art by *Spider-Man/Daredevil* collaborator Vatche Mavlian, the new mini-series follows Spider-Man and Wolverine as the duo embark on a global adventure, but according to Matthews, much of the series is devoted to finding out exactly how and why the two characters are where they are.

"It's told in a flashback," revealed Matthews. "We start with Peter Parker being interrogated under these hot lights, with his mask off but the rest of the Spider-Man costume on. It's basically this interrogator grilling him, taking us through this story. You won't even see Wolverine until the very end of the first book. It's just the story of their adventure and them kind of unraveling how to get back to the beginning of it all and how it all makes sense."

The writer also said while much of the story will revolve around the kind of action you'd expect of a Wolverine/Spider-Man team up, there will also be some time dedicated to how the two characters view each other.

"Basically this is Spider-Man and Wolverine thrown together on a globe-hopping mission—they're in a different country, if not two, every issue," explained Matthews. "It's a little bit different than what you'd expect. It's Peter Parker being yanked out of his daily life and thrust into this global problem. He finds himself very out of his element—you get to see Wolverine and Spider-Man play off each other and how different they are to each other. That's always fun." ■ MC

VIDEO GAMES WE WANT TO SEE AS COMICS

With Dreamwave securing the rights to several Capcom video games, UDON acquiring the *Street Fighter* license and Dark Horse spitting out a video game-based comic on a monthly basis, could we be seeing the beginnings of a new trend? We hope so, since the only thing we love here at *Wizard* more than comics would have to be video games. Here's a rundown of games that we wanna see get the four-color treatment.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

DREAM TEAM: Brian Azzarello (w), Eduardo Risso (a)

THE CONCEPT: Welcome to 1980s Vice City, a thriving oceanside metropolis of big hair, pastel suits and fancy cars. Starring *über*-violent ex-con Tommy Vercetti, *Vice City* mixes "Miami Vice" with *100 Bullets*, which makes *100 Bullets* creators Azzarello and Risso a perfect fit for a comic about the world's most controversial game.

SILENT HILL 2

DREAM TEAM: Steve Niles (w), Ben Templesmith (a)

THE CONCEPT: James Sunderland's life is shattered when his wife Mary dies tragically. Three years later, a mysterious letter arrives from Mary, beckoning him to their sanctuary of memories, the dark realm of *Silent Hill*. This game gave us nightmares, and seeing that Niles and Templesmith scared the crap out of us with *30 Days of Night*, they'd work magic with a *Silent Hill* treatment.

SPLINTER CELL

DREAM TEAM: Greg Rucka (w), Alex Maleev (a)

THE CONCEPT: You are Sam Fisher, a silent and deadly splinter cell ordered to infiltrate the Soviet Republic of Georgia after two CIA agents go missing. Rucka, who's proven he's got a knack for black-ops stories (*Queen & Country*), would kick all kinds of ass on this book. Throw in the photo-realistic style of Maleev, and *Splinter Cell* would fly off shelves.

KINGDOM HEARTS

DREAM TEAM: Geoff Johns (w), Ed McGuinness (a)

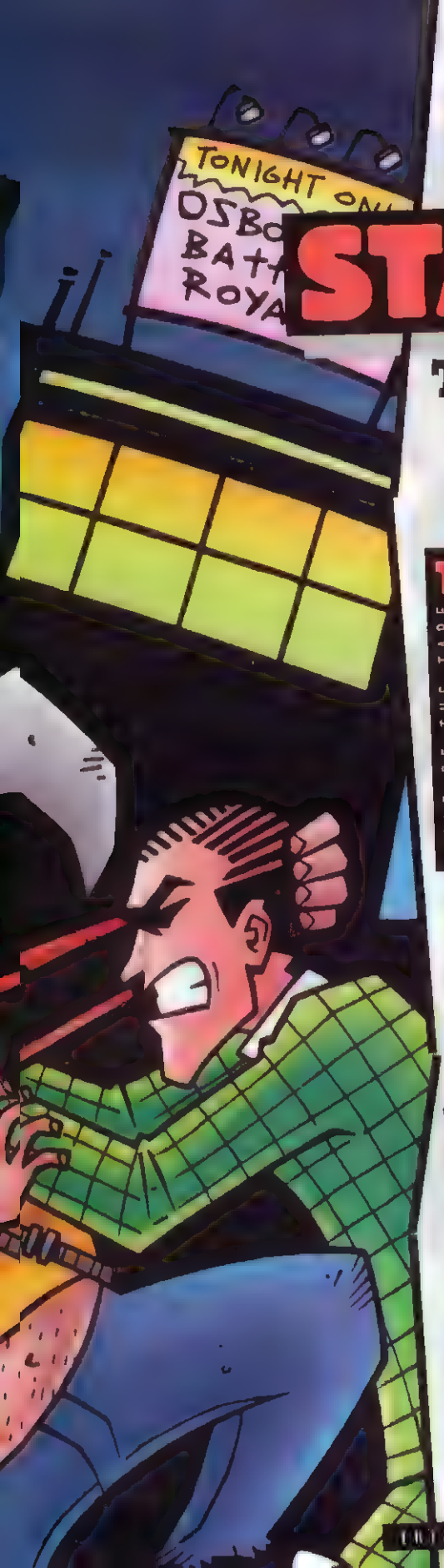
THE CONCEPT: Who would've thought mixing Disney with Final Fantasy characters would make for one of the hottest video games? Let McGuinness run wild with this fantasy-based tale, and since villains keep the story moving in the game, Johns would be a perfect writer for this project.

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

DREAM TEAM: Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning (w), Alan Davis (a)

THE CONCEPT: A prototype cyborg Marine teams up with a ragtag crew of human Marines to stop unified alien races from wiping out mankind as part of their holy war. The *Legion* writing team of Abnett and Lanning has shown time and again that they can write great sci-fi stories, and Davis' clean style would move the fast-paced story along nicely. ■ CS

MAH
FOOD
2003



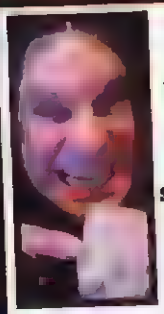
LAST MAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

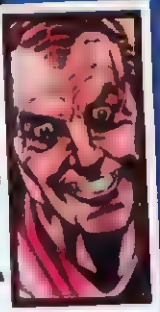
THE OSBOURNES VS. THE OSBORNS

THE COMBATANTS

TALE OF THE TAPE



5'9"	HEIGHT	5'11"
165 lbs.	WEIGHT	185 lbs.
69"	REACH	71"
Black Sabbath	GROUP AFFILIATION	Spidey's Rogues
You name it	CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY	Goblin formula



origins... Ozzy Osbourne is the Prince of F---ing Darkness! Jack's his snotty teenage son, who possesses a no-limit Platinum card and raging hormones!

Norman Osborn created a formula that granted him superhuman abilities but also drove him insane, transforming into the Green Goblin! His only son Harry's been something of an embarrassment, the high point of his life being the nailing of the ultra-hot Liz Allen.

the battle... During an Ozzfest tour stop, a semi-lucid Ozzy goes for a stroll, and ends up at the penthouse home of Norman Osborn. Mistaking it for his house, Ozzy looks to fix his fourth burrito of the day, so he heads to the kitchen, where he interrupts Norman and Harry arguing over use of the Goblin Glider. "W-w-w-what the f--- are you p-p-p-people doing in my k-k-k-k-kitchen?" bellows Ozzy. Meanwhile, Jack's been tracking his father to complain about Kelly's musical career ("She's such a f---ing rock star!"), and at that moment, he bursts in to help his devilish dad. "F--- you, you f---ing tossers!" exclaims a raucous Jack. "Me and my dad will f--- you f---ers up!" Pulling a bayonet, Jack charges Harry, who does all he can to protect himself from the devastating power of a teenage white boy with an enormous afro. Meanwhile, Ozzy sees the Goblin Glider floating nearby, his eyes lighting up like the fires of hell! "Rock-n-roll!" screams the Prince of F---ing Darkness, as he grabs the bat-shaped glider and bites the head off! After evicting the Osborns from their own home, Ozzy and Jack scheme as to how to run the "new" OzCorp. "N-n-n-n-now we can get rid of that f---ing Superman for good!" A bewildered Jack's reply: "Sure, dad."

This month's battle drawn by JIM MAHFOOD

FIRSTLOOK

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Writer Peter David tackles the terrapins in Dreamwave's all-new ongoing series

If it were up to Peter David, he'd change one thing about the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

He'd make the "Ninja" come first.

"I'm attempting to put a new spin on the Turtles, trying to emphasize the ninja aspect," says David, writer of Dreamwave's all-new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series based off of the Fox Kids animated series. "Ninjas are unseen and stick to the shadows. At the same time, I'm keeping with the grittiness that [original TMNT creators] Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird established in the Mirage comic books. Many of the more annoying aspects of the original animated series are being toned down or eliminated altogether. I mean, what character says 'Cowabunga' anymore?"

Premiering this June, the Heroes in a Halfshell make their Dreamwave debut in an all-new, ongoing series with art chores handled by newcomer LeSean (*Arkanium*). While based on the current cartoon, David makes it clear that his version of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Donatello—the four title characters who mutated into intelligent turtles after stumbling into a mysterious green ooze—won't be the fun-loving amphibians that became marketing juggernauts in the late '80s.

David kicks off the series with a storyline echoing the cartoon, but plans on giving Turtle-fans more story in the new comic. As a matter of fact, other than a few brief glimpses and cameos, fans won't even see the Turtles until after the fourth issue!

"I want to do something other than simply a straight-up adaptation of the animated series because, really, what's the point of that?" says David. "In the first couple of issues, I'm not focusing on the Turtles themselves specifically, but on ancillary characters who are in the show. We'll be seeing the Turtles not from their own point of view, but from secondary characters who don't quite know everything that's going on."

In the first few issues, the story will follow an unnamed beat cop (first introduced in the animated series) who catches a glimpse of the Turtles out of the corner of his eye. Although the cartoon stops featuring the character, David will explore the mystery cop, making him a major player in the story.

While several other new players will be added to the TMNT universe, David will bring back some familiar faces—namely the evil Shredder and his ninja clan, The Foot. Most importantly, David stresses "new" for TMNT fans, young or old.

"I want to give a fresh point of view," says David. "I hope to show the Turtles in a different light, while introducing them to new fans."

Staff Writer Casey Seijas continues to say it loud and say it proud: "Cowabunga!"

BY CASEY SEIJAS

SHELLHEADS

THE DILLY-O

These Heroes in a Halfshell kick some serious shell this summer in Dreamwave's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, written by Peter David (*Captain Marvel*) with art by LeSean (*Arkanium*). While this series ties into the current Fox Kids animated cartoon, don't expect to see a bunch of cutesy, pizza-eating teenage terrapins—these ninjas are badass!

WHY YOU CARE

Because David plans on taking the Turtles back to the wacky, yet uber-violent days of the Eastman/Laird *TMNT* comics!

DID YOU KNOW?

David nearly lost his family prior to taking the assignment. "I like the Turtles, but I am trying to cut back on licensed tie-ins because, frankly, I'm getting too old to have to deal with it," said David. "But my kids made it abundantly clear that if I wanted to have them keep talking to me, I would take on the assignment, because they are huge fans." ■ CS

APRIL
FOOL
GOD

From Absurd to Zany, WIZARD proudly presents comics' most ridiculous moments

By Casey Seijas and the Wizard Staff

There's an old saying that goes, "You've gotta take the good with the Spider-Clone."

Alright, maybe that's not exactly how the old cliché goes, but in terms of comics, for every *Watchmen* and *Marvels*, there's a *Captain Carrot* or *Ravage 2099*. However, while some comics serve as the dictionary definition of just plain terrible (and trust us, we've read our share), there's a small fraction that go beyond the call of crappy and venture into the realm of the absurd. Basically, comics so utterly ridiculous, you wonder how they were blessed with the green light in the first place.

Despite the fact that we often wonder what exactly the creators of these comics were smoking when they thought up some of their, um, *unique* ideas, we just can't help but love ¥¥ludicrous stories and characters. The reason is simple—they make us laugh. And if you think we need to have our heads examined for admitting to our guilty pleasures, then think again, because we ain't the only ones with a soft spot for stupid—er, *offbeat* superhero humor.

"Sometimes you just need some silly comics, man," says *Avengers* writer and admitted *Wild Dog* fan Geoff Johns. "I love buying old Silver Age stuff, like when Superboy was trying to learn how to fly by tying balloons to his ass. That stuff's great! I like serious comics too, but I consider some of the cheesiest comics my personal favorites."

With that said, join *Wizard* as we take you through a literal showcase of silliness, running down some of the most absurd moments, craziest characters and ridiculous concepts your local quarter bin has to offer.

Opening illustration by Brian Douglas Ahern

WHAT IF 7-YEAR-OLDS DID COMICS?

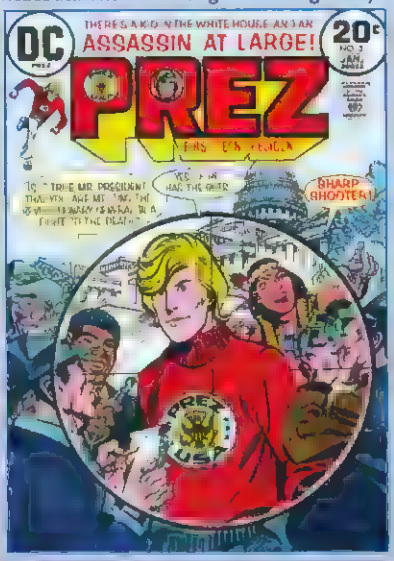
(*Brute Force* #1-#4, Marvel)

A grizzly bear driving around a bear-shaped tank? Uzi-toting dolphins? A kangaroo in pants? Granted, we always thought watching a bear take on a gorilla, or a lion square off against a rhino would make for a kick-ass Fox reality show, but after reading Marvel's attempt at an "eco-friendly" miniseries (where the animal kingdom takes a paws-on approach to saving the planet), we're not so sure anymore.

WHAT IF 8-YEAR-OLDS DID COMICS?

(*Prez* #3, DC)

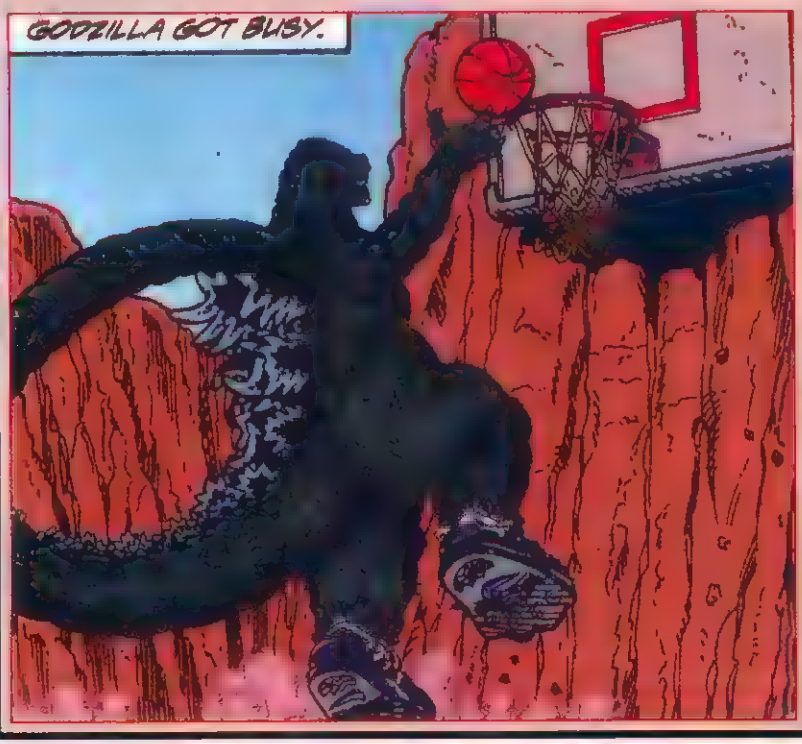
Interesting how the absurdity of a teenage president of the most powerful nation on Earth takes a backseat to that haircut/sweater combo. This ish: Prez takes on a resurrected Revolutionary War general in a duel to the death over gun control and bests him with a headbutt. The '70s can't get far enough away.



SINGLE GREATEST COMIC PANEL OF ALL TIME

(*Godzilla vs. Barkley* one-shot, Dark Horse)

Why this isn't an ongoing series will join the pyramids, Stonehenge and Carrot Top's continued career as one of the greatest mysteries of all time. The premise: The city of Los Angeles lies gripped with terror as a rampaging Godzilla draws near. Their only hope: a 300-foot-tall Charles Barkley (Mothra was busy doing guest commentary on "SportsCenter"). The giant Sir Charles we'll take in stride, but where'd Godzilla get those hightops?



TERRIFYING—YET DELICIOUS!

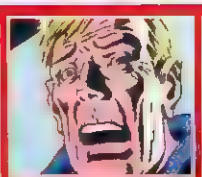
(*Captain America* #395, Marvel)

SUPER-STUPID SERUM

Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty, idol to millions and the living embodiment of the U.S. of A.

You'd think with a résumé like that, Cap would be immune to bad story ideas, but on the contrary, he's been the victim of so many atrocious character revamps and unreadable plots, we felt it necessary to devote an entire sidebar to him. Take a journey through time as Wizard shows you some of Cap's greatest misses.

CAPTAIN AMERICA COMICS #48 Cap [illegible] Nazis into ovens!



WHAT IF? (VOL. 1) #38 Septuagenarian Cap! Says "screw it" to shuffleboard!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #355–#356 Teen Cap gets his ass kicked!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #383 Cap meets Johnny Appleseed!

POP STAR WE WISH WOULD MEET SIMON FROM 'AMERICAN IDOL' OR AN ONCOMING BUS

(*Nightcat* one-shot, Marvel)

"Cross me boy, and I'll guarantee/just what it means to be history."

That lyric—pulled from the trainwreck-ish CD promoted with this equally offensive comic—sums up the musical wasteland that was the '80s (Whitesnake excluded). Proof positive that escapees from county renaissance fairs—and their tassels—should stick to blowing glass and leave the music to the professionals. Like Whitesnake.

FUNNIEST CORNER BOX EVER

(*WCW* #1, Marvel)

"Gonna getcha! GONNA GETCHA!"

GIVE IT UP, PUNK. YOU'RE FINISHED. JUST LOOK AT YOU. YOU'RE FINISHED.
LOOK AT YOU. YOU CAN'T EVEN GET UP. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S FINISHED
KHOFF

BEHOLD...THE THESAURUS!

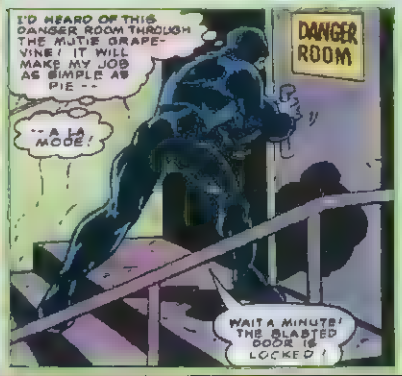
(*Spawn/Batman* one-shot, Image/DC)

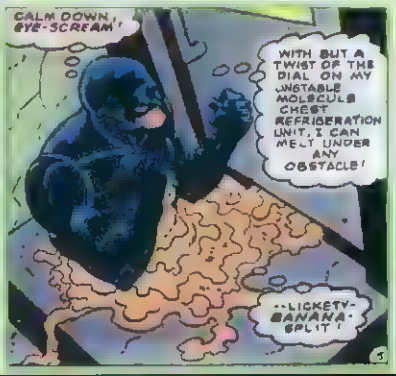
Possibly the most disappointing comic since *Godzilla vs. Charles Barkley* #1 didn't have a *Godzilla vs. Charles Barkley* #2. Written by Frank Miller and drawn by Todd McFarlane, this landfill of a comic made *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* read like, well, *The Dark Knight Returns*. By the eighth time Batman calls Spawn a "punk" (for a total of 11 times), you feel like the punk for shelling out the—EEP!—four-dollar cover price. Punk.

WHAT IF ADAM WEST WROTE COMICS?

(*Obnoxio the Clown vs. The X-Men* one-shot, Marvel)

Okay, granted this one-shot was deliberately intended to be a funny offshoot from the normally dark tone of *Uncanny X-Men*, but come on, this ish introduced the world to the terror of Eye-Scream, an evil mutant with the ability to—turn into any flavor of ice cream he desires?! Don't let the Blob get ahold of this guy.

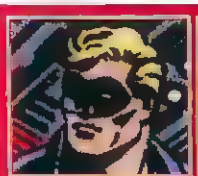

I'D HEARD OF THIS DANGER ROOM THROUGH THE MUTIE GRAPEVINE! IT WILL MAKE MY JOB AS SIMPLE AS PIE --
DANGER ROOM
--A LA MODE!
WAIT A MINUTE! THE BLASTED DOOR IS LOCKED!


CALM DOWN, EYE-SCREAM!
WITH BUT A TWIST OF THE DIAL ON MY UNSTABLE MOLECULE CHEST REFRIGERATION UNIT, I CAN MELT UNDER ANY OBSTACLE!
--LICKETY-BANANA-SPLIT!

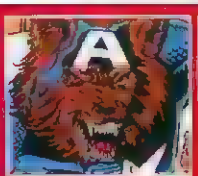
BEHOLD... THE X-BABIES!

(*Uncanny X-Men Annual* #10, Marvel)

Streaky the SuperCat—no, the entire pre-*Crisis* DC universe—has got nuthin' on this. Except maybe Bat-Hombre (keep reading). Proving that not everything that starts with "X" in the Marvel U. gets an "A," Marvel's attempt to make the X-Men cute ended up as a debacle that simply reeked of a crossover from hell: The X-Men meet DC's Silver Age.

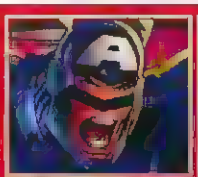


CAPTAIN AMERICA
#387–#392 Cap [illegible]'s woman!

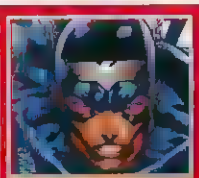


CAPTAIN AMERICA
#402–#408 Cap-Mole! Yuff said!

CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL
#14 Cap chokes the chicken! (The Bolting Bastard)



CAPTAIN AMERICA
#425–#434 Cap wears NFL Superpro armor!

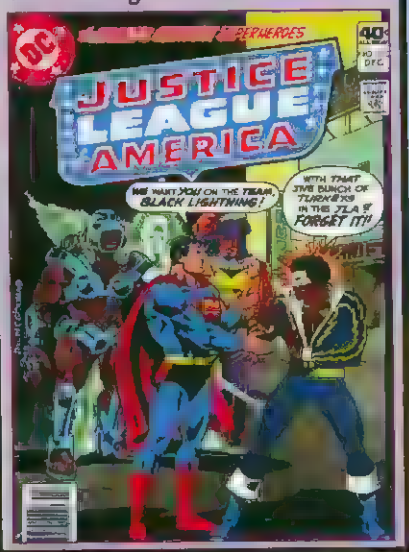


CAPTAIN AMERICA (VOL. 2) #1
Cap meets Bob Liefeld's pencil!

CAPTAIN AMERICA: SENTINEL OF LIBERTY
Revolutionary War Cap!

WHY BLACK CHARACTERS SHOULDN'T BE WRITTEN BY WHITE PEOPLE UNLESS THEY'RE BRIAN AZZARELLO

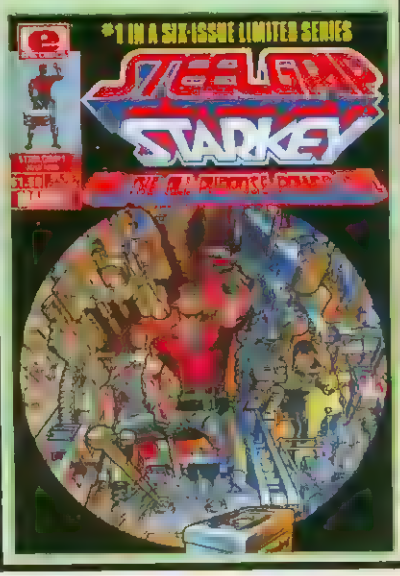
(*Justice League of America* #173, DC)

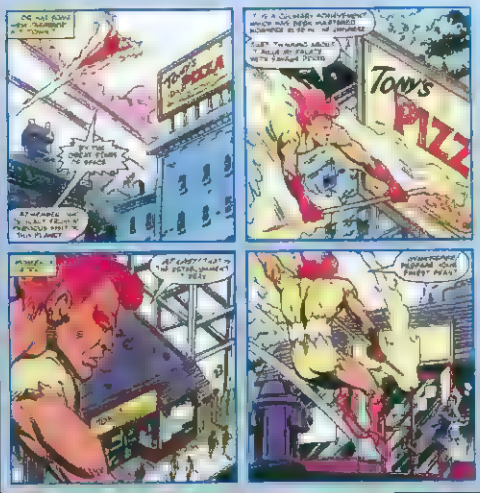

DC SUPERHEROES
JUSTICE LEAGUE AMERICA
WE WANT YOU ON THE TEAM, BLACK LIGHTNING!
WITH THAT JIVE BUNCH OF TURKEYS IN THE JLA? FORGET IT!!

MOST SUGGESTIVE COMIC TITLE

(*Steelgrip Starkey and the All-Purpose Power Tool* #1, Epic/Marvel)

The story about a burly construction worker who, as the inside subhead states, is "out to prove that a good man, with the proper tool, can work miracles." God, this makes us hot.





STUPID EVEN IF IT WAS A 'WHAT IF?' STORY, WHICH IT WASN'T

(*Amazing Spider-Man* #269, Marvel)

Firelord—faithful herald to the ravager of worlds, Galactus, who bestowed upon his willing servant the dreaded Power Cosmic, capable of laying waste to worlds and warping the fabric of reality itself! This ish: Firelord comes to Earth for a pizza, gets sprayed through a door with a fire hose and gets in a fistfight! We've got two words to sum up this comic book black eye: double cheese.

WHEN VIGILANTES SHOP AT WALMART

(*Wild Dog* #1-#4, DC)

DC's Wild Dog: a poor man's Punisher or that creepy dude from high school that wore the same hockey jersey and camo fatigues every day? You decide!

FURTHER PROOF WHY ALL JUNGLES SHOULD BE BLACKTOPPED

(*Daredevil* #210, Marvel)

Meet Micah Synn, leader of the Kingorge Tribe and master of the concept of survival of the fittest. Sounds like a pretty cool villain, until you get a look at this character and realize he's simply Kraven Lite, complete with buckskin pants, a zebra-skin vest and tribal accessories. Why Marvel felt the need to introduce a new Kraven is beyond us—we always thought the first one sucked.

ACCENT-TUATE THE NEGATIVE

It's been one thing we love more than inadvertently silly comics, it's inadvertently silly accents. Whether it's Black Lightning's "jive talk" (is that even a socially accepted term anymore?) or Banshee's stereotypical Irish brogue, funky dialects make for great humor. Here are a few of our favorites.

"You have ruined my entire empire! You... you will! I guess these are the fortunes of war. C'est la vie!"
—Baron Zemo, *Captain America* #282

"Where do they buy their tempered steel? Asking for a friend."
—Darkseid on Wolverine's claws

"Cowboy, make Dave take it back. Zook left the cupcakes by the door and Dave touched them."
—Kangaroo, *Spider-Man's Tangled Web* #17

"You think the fighter with the claws and the mutton chops and the accent doesn't have a shot at the title?"
—Announcer, *Uncanny X-Men* #141

BEST 'ELECTRIC COMPANY' ESCAPEE

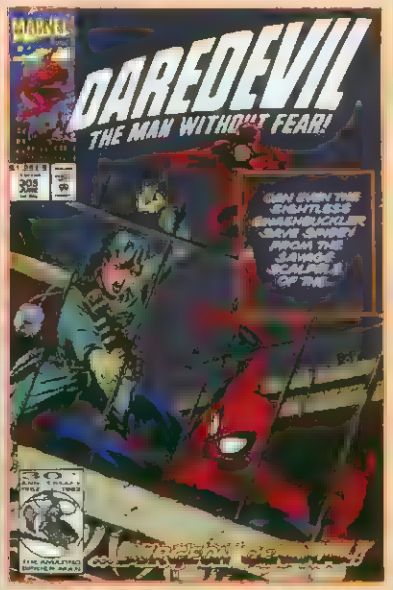
(*Peter Parker: Spider-Man* #23, Marvel)

In the live-action "Electric Company" episodes, Spidey once fought a yeti who stayed cool by squatting on ice cream cones. While we're only now wondering how much damage those images did to our infant psyches, we offer up the second worst Spidey villain since that hairy two-scoop squatter: Typeface, the villain (Can you spell "A-S-S"?) who hit people with giant commas. At least he doesn't sit on them.

VIVA EL BAT-HOMBRE!

(*Batman* #193, DC)

In a move you could only get away with in a Silver Age book, Batman ditches Gotham for a tiny Latin American country overrun by crime and poorly written Spanish accents. After visiting with the president of said country, Batman soon becomes responsible for training the country's very own Batman, or rather, Bat-Hombre. Luckily he has the help of a talking parrot and a mask-wearing Bat-*Caballo* (that's Bat-Horse to you *gringos* out there) to help complete the task. Joel Schumacher to direct.



WHEN ALLITERATION ATTACKS! TONIGHT ON FOX

(*Daredevil* #305, Marvel)

THE PERFECT REPRESENTATION OF LIFE ON THE ROAD (WITHOUT THE 'LUDES AND HOOKERS)

(*U.S. 1* #1-#12, Marvel)

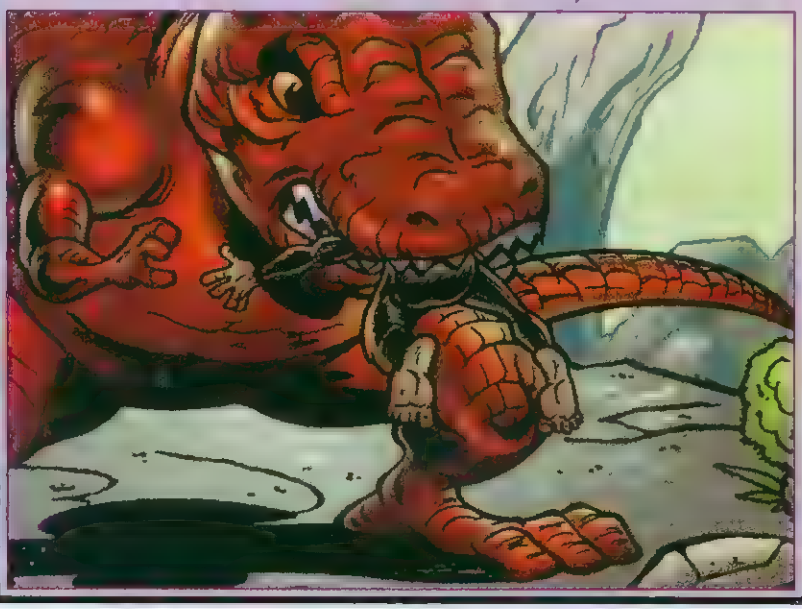
This book would be better with 'ludes and hookers.

PANEL WE'D MOST LIKE TO SEE

(*Devil Dinosaur* #10 [fingers crossed!], Marvel)

How the exploits of a cherry-red T-Rex ridden by a monkey spouting broken caveman-speak didn't click with readers remains a mystery.

Recently, *Wizard* uncovered the long forgotten final issue of Jack Kirby's magnum opus, *Devil Dinosaur*! Shown here for the first time is a panel from the never-published issue #10 of the series...or at least how we would've liked to see the story end.



"Bogarrah! 'Tain't Ireland we've been shootin' to, teammates!"
—Shamrock, *Contest of Champions* #1

"Hey, mama, I ain't never stopped bein' no chick, but that don't mean I'm gonna let you shoot me!"
—Power Man, *Power Man and Iron Fist* #85

"Herr Kapitan... you are still beaten, you degenerate schweine, you have the—see Jet-Y a Yankee trick."
—Red Skull, *Captain America/Nick Fury: The Blood Truth*

"Oui! In my native France, I am called... Le Peregrine! Winged champion of la verite, la justice and la drapeau de la France!"
—Le Peregrine, *Contest of Champions* #3

"Nothin' happened to me! I'm still the same lovin' blue-eyed monster I always was. Blablo's nothin' but a phony; ya know? Lotta big new age words but no nice music to put ya to sleep."
—The Thing, *Fantastic Four* (vol. 3) #36

"Leprechauns? Shamrocks? I'm talking to you!—oh, wait, I'm not my friends! Where are my friends? The battle! What's happened to them?"
—Nightcrawler, *Uncanny X-Men* #193

THE WORST COMIC EVER

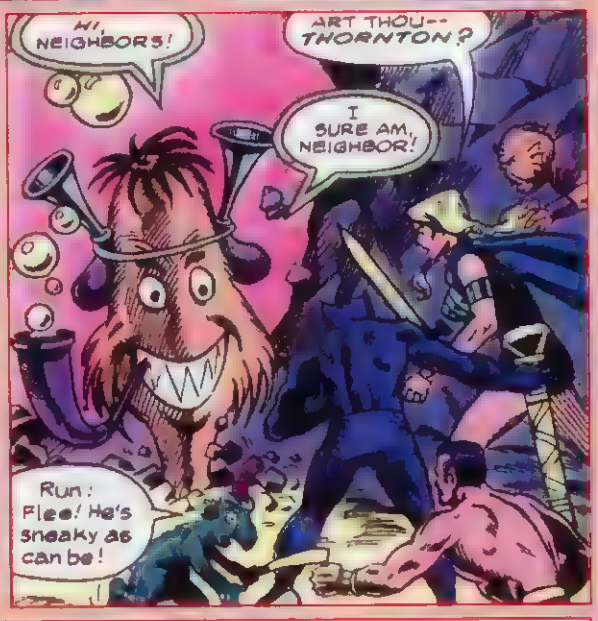
(*The Defenders* #115, Marvel)

Superhero comics: fun to read. Dr Seuss books: also fun to read. A superhero spin on a Dr. Seuss book: surprisingly excruciating to read.

Granted, Marvel's *The Defenders* never prided itself on being vital comic reading (after all, issue #8 of the 2001 relaunch actually carried the tagline "The Worst Comic Ever Produced"), but when *The Defenders* #115 hit stands in January of 1983, it set a new standard of god-awfulness that to this day has yet to be matched. Many may have come close, but in terms of absolute crap, this ish is like M.C. Hammer—they can't touch it.

GREENBEGS--THY WEAPONS ARE BUT...PLASTIC! HOW WILT THOU ROUT THE ENEMY WITH SUCH TOYS?
We have no wish to bash or bop! We only want this war to stop!
BUT...PLASTIC? ART THOU DAFT?

Nor should you, for that matter. In this issue that had us literally clawing at our eyes after reading halfway through it (legend has it no one has ever been able to make it through the entire issue), a team of Beast, Namor, Valkyrie and Gargoyle find themselves in a Dr. Seuss-esque world after a teleportation mishap. There they encounter a land of Muppet-like characters who rhyme everything they say, yet while Dr. Seuss books manage to tell stories via clever rhyme-schemes and funny, nonsensical words, reading the rhymes in this is kind of like listening to your dad rapping



The story finds the four Defenders teaming up with the unlovable critters of "Here" in a battle against the evil forces of "There," only to find out that the whole fiasco started simply because the two warring lands were from two different, conflicting locales. We can only assume that reading this is what it must be like if you accidentally took the brown acid at Woodstock.

The highlight of the issue: Namor jumping into what he believes is an ocean, only to come out sputtering, "This isn't water...it's a shake!" Fight your morbid curiosity. Do not buy this issue. Trust us.

HE DOES--AND SO...
The time has come for you to go! And, oh we all shall miss you so!
But say the words we said to say--and soon you'll find yourselves away!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, SUBBY? EITHER KISS THE COWARDLY LION GOODBYE--OR START CLICKING THOSE HEELS TOGETHER!
BEAST, YOUR INSOLENCE WILL--
OH--WHAT IS THE USE?!
"THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE THE PLACE I CAME FROM BEFORE I CAME--
LIK
KLK

THE BEST COMIC EVER (FOR ALL THE WRONG REASONS)

(*The Defenders* #63, Marvel)

Awful, campy dialogue, far too many ridiculous characters, terrible villains and absolutely no cohesive plot—God, we love this book!

No, we haven't finally lost our minds after reading all of the preposterous books in this feature. Rather, *The Defenders* #63 serves as the prime example of a book being so bad that it becomes great.

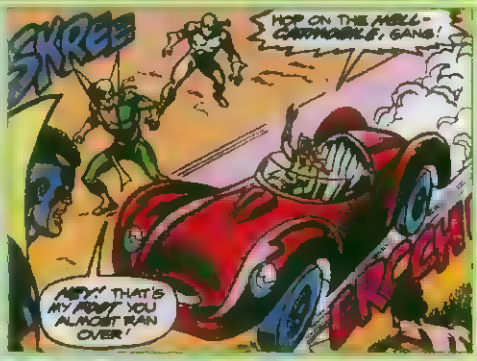
To start with, we could easily write a full-length feature simply on the dialogue of this ish alone. Whether it's the White Tiger forcefully showing his Spanish heritage every time he speaks (our personal favorite line being "You are *muy* misinformed, *señor*!" as he attacks Batroc "ze" Leaper), or pretty much any time Hercules opens his trap ("Hercules hungers for well-met conflict—let us all *begone*!"), *The Defenders* #63 had us laughing hysterically with each panel.

Then come the villains, or rather, lack thereof. True, there is an epic (*snicker*), four-page battle between a literal gaggle of second-string heroes and villains (far too many too mention here) at the end of the book which leads to a "shocking" ending (hint: they all get arrested by the NYPD), but it's two new villains that steal the show. First, there's an angry, Wall Street-type who calls on the Defenders to return his car after it's stolen, only to discover it's his son who stole it, leaving the Defenders to take the rap for a paint scuff! Second, a giant amoeba shows up in the former Soviet Union for two pages, eats a villain called The Presence, and literally has nothing else to do with the story.

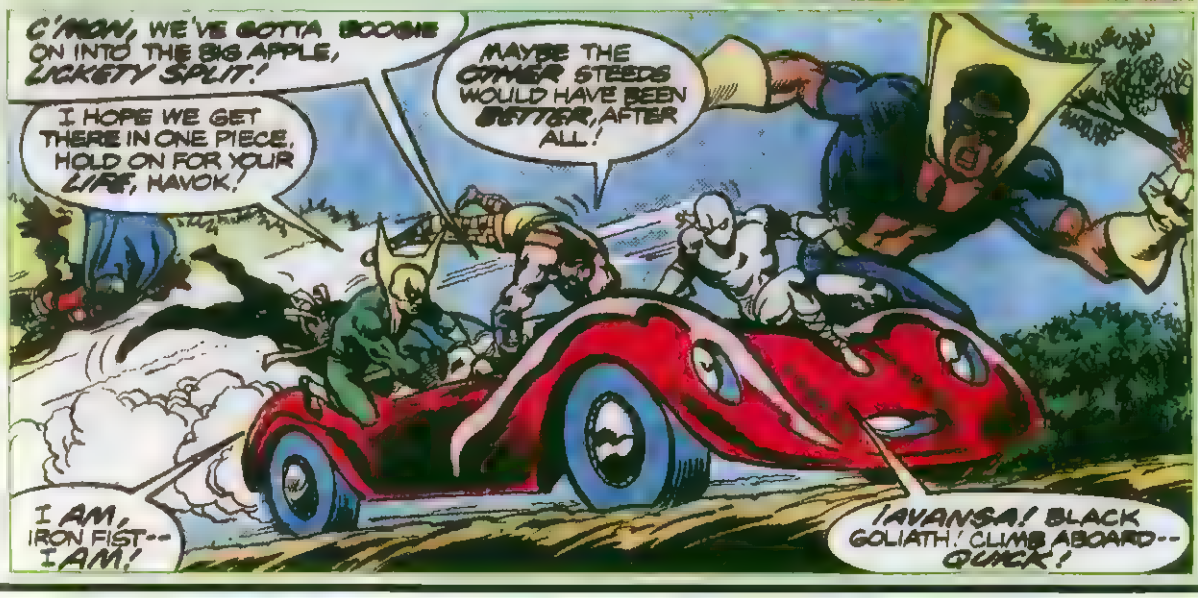
Finally, the lineup of Defenders (who at one point total 23 members!) show a cast that's better off long-forgotten—which in a sense makes them perfect Defenders. Case in point: Heroes like Tagak, Torpedo and Nova get their long-awaited chance at comic book stardom, yet only remind us why they're better off pulling a Bucky Barnes.

This book is a riot and a must-read. Go out, raid the quarter bins, glue yourself to online auctions, heck, ransack your Grandma's attic...do whatever you gotta do, but get yourself a copy of this craptacular classic!

BUT HULK'S FLIGHT IS NOT THE ONLY CRISIS!
JUST WAIT'LL I GET MY HANDS ON YOU, FALCON!
FORGET YOUR PETTY ANGER, HAWK-- WE MUST NOT FIGHT AMONG OURSELVES!
I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT ANYBODY, BUT YOU TWO HAVE PANICKED MY HORSE--
--AND I CAN'T STOP!
--THE PEERLESS POWER OF HERCULES!
KAAAAAA
MATCH...H
CONVINCED THAT HERCULES HAS THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND, IRON MAN AGAIN TAKES TO THE SKY--



The Wizard Staff would like to take a few moments to mention some of the Absurd Honorable Mentions. ..but we figure you've been through enough already


C'MON, WE'VE GOTTA BOOGIE ON INTO THE BIG APPLE, LICKETY SPLIT!
I HOPE WE GET THERE IN ONE PIECE, HOLD ON FOR YOUR LIFE, HAVOK!
MAYBE THE OTHER STEEDS WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER, AFTER ALL!
I AM, IRON FIST-- I AM!
!AVANSA! BLACK GOLIATH! CLIMB ABOARD-- QUICK!

HER

BOOK of the MONTH!
SPECIAL REPORT

The WIZARD editorial team takes center stage as six staffers select their favorite comic

By The Wizard Staff

When blood stained the floor, we knew the discussion had only just begun.

To think it began as a harmless *Wizard* staff meeting to finalize this issue's content. We concocted all the features with ease, as everything fell into place. Most of the departments and columns fell in line, the room's synergy focused on the last of them: "Book of the Month."

Managing Editor Andy Serwin said we'd be nuts not to cover DC's cop drama *Gotham Central*, while Editor-in-Chief Pat McCallum made a strong case for why Marvel's *Captain Marvel* blows him away. Staff Writer Casey Seijas shook off both their offerings and countered with *X-Statix* topping his list, while Managing Editor Joe Yanarella and Editor Brian Cunningham both vehemently pushed for *Ultimate Spider-Man*. Even the new guys, Associate Editor Jesse Thompson and Staff Writer Richard Ho, boldly dismissed all the other series, tersely arguing that *Daredevil* and *Fables*, respectively, deserve the spotlight. Staff Writer Mike Cotton started to offer up his choice, but was silenced by Andy who booted everything unless it was titled *Gotham Central*.

Cotton threw the first punch. Andy took it like a man and catapulted the writer into Jesse, who countered with a leg kick. Cotton went for the face, while headlocking Rich (who cleverly scammed Cotton's wallet). As Pat prepared his super-slam on Casey, a voice came from the ether.

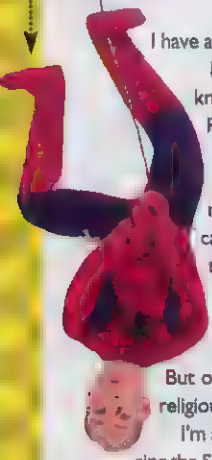
"Why not put 'em all in one feature?" Joe asked, taking Brian's 20 buck wager lost on the fracas.

Why not, indeed? Let everybody have their favorites, writing them in a very personal first-person style, explaining exactly WHY they're their faves. Of the hundreds we read every month, these comics race to the top of our pile.

So read on and discover why it's worth the bloodshed to give you the best in comics. Get the lowdown on our six favorite titles and why you're crazy if you're not reading them. And if you're still not convinced, we'll come over there and give you a nut shot!

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN (MARVEL)

By Joe Yanarella



I have a confession to make. I don't read comics.

I can't tell you what the X in X-Men stands for. I don't know the difference between Hal Jordan and Kyle Rayner. I'm not sure what *Crisis* accomplished.

But despite not being a Mylar-carrying member of Fanboy Nation, I flip through the new comic releases every week. In my primarily administrative capacity as Senior Managing Editor, I'm not expected to be a content guru, but I like to stay abreast of storylines, creative changes and just be aware of what the "buzz" books are.

I flip through every title, some faster than others. But one title compels me to stop, forcing me to read it religiously—*Ultimate Spider-Man*.

I'm as familiar with Spider-Man as the next person; I can sing the Spider-Man cartoon theme, rattle off a few villains and that's about it. And that's why I love *Ultimate Spider-Man*. It is the essence of the wisecracking character that I grew up with.

It's the age-old story of boy struggles to fit in, boy falls for girl, boy gets bitten by irradiated spider, dons spandex and soars around the city on a web fighting crime.

It's like "Dawson's Creek" on steroids.

But it's so much more than that. Writer Brian Michael Bendis—along with artist Mark Bagley—has crafted an incredibly poignant tale, prioritizing characterization. I am spellbound by the personal trials and tribulations while slam-bang action becomes secondary. It's the same feeling I got when I watch the "Spider-Man" movie or TV's "Smallville." The special effects and action scenes are awesome but what has me hooked are the character's everyday troubles.

GIRL TALK Mary Jane pours her heart out to Peter, breaking his in the process.

I'm riveted waiting to see if Peter will crack and share his Spidey secret with Mary (he does!) or Aunt May (he doesn't!).

I'm mesmerized as Gwen Stacy bursts on the scene with the subtlety of a sledgehammer, delivering a scathing, rambling one-page diatribe on superpowers.

I'm devastated as a nightmare-wracked Mary, crushed by the weight of Peter's secret and the danger it has put her in, dumps our noble hero.

"There's no gimmick," explains Bendis, "it's just honest storyte ling. These are real people."

Ultimate Spider-Man relies on themes that any reader can relate to. The feeling of being ostracized, of not fitting in while trying desperately to be accepted. Of longing and pining for the pretty girl. Of wanting to do the right thing while temptation swirls. Of the feeling of being caught in quicksand, never being able to get ahead as the world is seemingly stacked against you.

"Nothing has served me better than reopening all the wounds from high school," laughs Bendis. "Every horrible thing that I did, said or was done to me is in there."

But it's not all pain and angst. Bendis beautifully weaves humor into the story, mixing in classic Spidey banter, whether it's making fun of Kingpin's weight or Doc Ock's haircut ("I'm the haircut police. There's a $50 fine for bowlcuts in NYC.") or depantsing the good doctor and mocking his tighty whiteys.

And while the villains may seem secondary (we don't even get a good look at a super-baddie till Norman Osborn goes mutant-evil on Peter in issue #6), Bendis offers up neat twists on the origins of the Green Goblin, Doc Ock and Venom. Kraven the Hunter was particularly cool—he's a TV reality show host/hunter a la Steve Irwin. The next sweeping storyarc will focus on a "totally new antagonist," Bendis says, as Peter meets someone his own age who doesn't boast the same moral fiber. As expected, sparks—and punches and webs—fly.

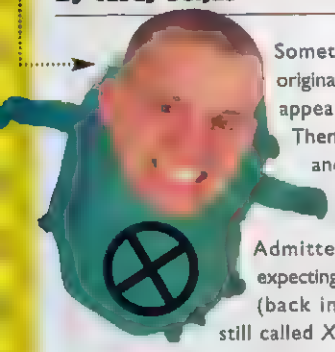
Bendis admits the next storyarc has him juiced like no other.

"I get connected to these characters," Bendis says, his voice rising with excitement. "I get swept up in this book like no other."

And so do I.

X-STATIX (MARVEL)

By Casey Seijas

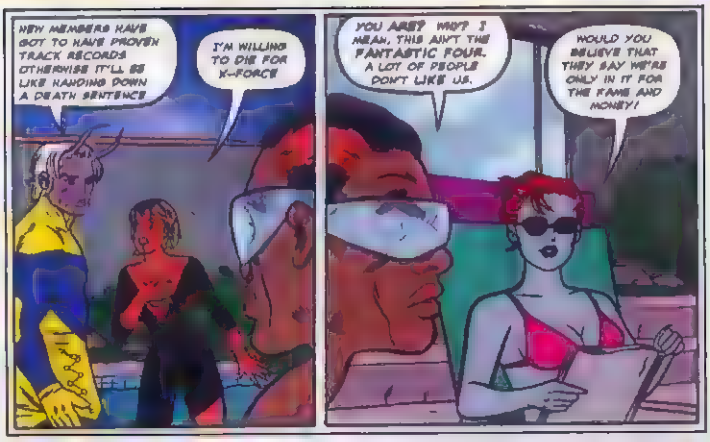


Sometimes I think that all original superhero ideas disappeared after the 1980s. Then I picked up *X-Statix* and was blown away—much like half the cast of the book!

Admittedly, I really wasn't expecting much from this series (back in 2001 when it was still called *X-Force*) when Marvel announced writer Peter Milligan and artist Mike Allred would be revamping the title. In fact, thanks to the limited press Marvel offered up prior to the relaunch, I really didn't know *what* to expect exactly. Based on what I knew—that being *yet another* X-book featuring characters I'd never heard of that would die at any time (*ooo*, how shocking)—it simply sounded like the same ol' song and dance I'd heard hundreds of time before. To me, this thing had crash-and-burn written all over it! Honestly, if it wasn't for Allred's retro/quirky art style, which I'd grown to love on books like *Madman* and *Red Rocket 7*, I would've never given this book a chance. And I wasn't alone.

"At first sight, *X-Force* was not something I'd usually be interested in," explains Milligan. "But I think that started to become part of the attraction—a perverse hankering after what you know you shouldn't really do."

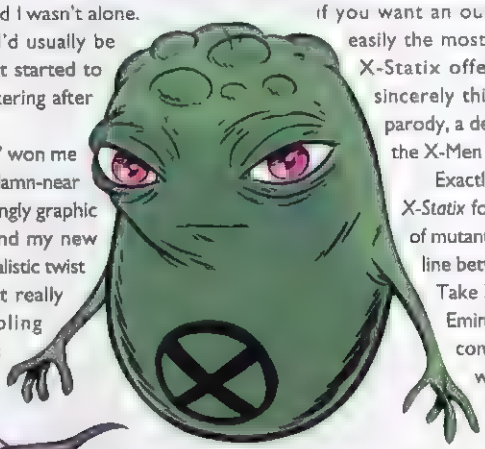
But Milligan and Allred's "perverse hankering" won me over with their first issue (*X-Force* #116) in which damn-near the entire team bites it in one of the most horrifyingly graphic panels I've ever seen in comics. I knew I'd found my new favorite comic. Blood 'n' guts aside, it's Milligan's realistic twist on a superteam of mutants that really had me hooked—squabbling celebrity superheroes more concerned with the size of their fan base and social status than saving the world. In other words, Milligan trashed the "hated and feared by humanity" stigma and turned his crew into rock stars complete with drug addictions, therapy sessions and bouts of manic depression.


NEW MEMBERS HAVE GOT TO HAVE PROVEN TRACK RECORDS OTHERWISE IT'LL BE LIKE HANDING DOWN A DEATH SENTENCE
I'M WILLING TO DIE FOR X-FORCE
YOU ARE? WHAT I MEAN, THIS AIN'T THE FANTASTIC FOUR. A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T LIKE US.
WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT THEY SAY WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE FAME AND MONEY!

CULT OF PERSONALITY When X-Statix aren't squashing baddies or cashing big checks, they're bickering like any dysfunctional family.

"I think what makes *X-Statix* unique is that fact that it's an X-Men book in disguise," explains series editor Axel Alonso. "I think that if you want an outsiders perspective of what's easily the most bankable franchise in comics, X-Statix offers you that point of view. I sincerely think that the series stands as a parody, a deconstruction and an homage to the X-Men universe. Plus, we've got Doop."

Exactly. The biggest drawing factor of *X-Statix* for me would have to be the cast of mutants themselves, which straddle the line between grotesque and cool-as-hell. Take Phat for instance, a homosexual, Eminem wannabe with the power to control his body fat and use it as a weapon. Or Dead Girl, a nigh-invincible zombie with the power to channel the spirits and energies of the dead. And my personal favorite—Doop, the X-Statix filmographer who resembles a flying green booger.

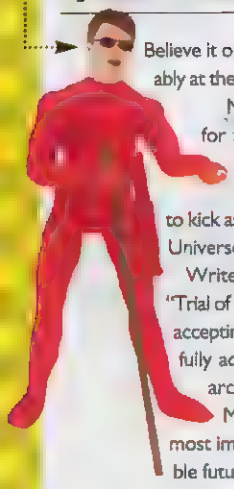


In upcoming issues, fans will see the return of Edie Sawyer (a.k.a. U-Go Girl, who died back in *X-Force* #128) in an April one-shot titled "The Diary of Edie Sawyer." Then, it's only natural that the team would eventually become movie stars, and that's what happens in issue #11's stand-alone story "X-Statix: The Movie."

I can't wait to read that stuff. If you haven't read an issue yet, you're definitely missing out on one of the best—and easily the most unique—superhero titles in comics. With clever stories, inimitable characters and a surprise in every issue, it's safe to say there's nothing static about *X-Statix*.

DAREDEVIL (MARVEL)

By Jesse Thompson



Believe it or not, some would say Daredevil is failing miserably at the superhero biz. But I'm not one of those people.

Month in and out, *Daredevil* tops my reading list for two reasons: First, to see how much more of Murdock's life can possibly be flushed down the crapper, and second, to witness DD continue to kick ass as the most dedicated man in tights the Marvel Universe has to offer.

Writer Brian Michael Bendis finished off 2002 with "Trial of the Century" (*DD* #38-#40), which saw Murdock accepting the case of the White Tiger, a vigilante wrongfully accused of murder. Bendis crafted a compelling arc by successfully building strong cases for both Murdock and the showboating prosecutor, and most importantly, creating a trial that mirrored a possible future for DD himself.

"That was so frickin' hard," admits Bendis of the research involved for the tense, courthouse-bound story. "I got casebooks, built a legal case and even had lawyers working with me. If Matt Murdock was on trial as Daredevil, here's how badly it could go. He might have to sit there and watch

Oh, you mean that burglar guy still. Man. Who wears a mask and robs things?
Can we please go?
Are you a some kind of age trouble that why you here?
Oh, are you talking about the tabloid stories that say I am Daredevil, is that what this is?
Well, as I don't know how close you're following the story, but we are in the middle of a very large lawsuit against the publishers of the tabloid.
As you can see, I'm a blind man and I get around.
Fine! THUMP
I didn't come here to go into this with you. I came here to tell you that you're a liar.
I quit
In this case, my white armor I am giving it to you.
I am saving town and I am never coming back.
You've won. You've won.

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF Even though Daredevil's identity was outed, Matt Murdock continues to deny, deny, deny.

the worst-case scenario of a superhero on trial, a guy being mocked and raked over the coals."

Ultimately, both Murdock and the Tiger get torched. White Tiger is found guilty, blames Murdock and flees the courtroom. Gunned down on the courthouse steps, the Tiger's death leads directly into the "Lowlife" arc (#41-#45). Daredevil, speared by his failed defense, his friend's death and the influx of the MGH (mutant growth hormone) drug in Hell's Kitchen, is confronted with a status quo like never before.

Even friend Luke Cage turns on Murdock with a tête-à-tête that left me speechless. When Murdock demands to know why Cage keeps giving him the cold shoulder, Cage sums up what many *DD* readers have been thinking ever since Murdock announced he was suing the tabloid that outed his secret identity.

"You turned into a lowlife piece of garbage," says Cage, in reference to Murdock's deny-deny-deny legal strategy. "When it comes down to it—you're just a liar."

Whoa! Not so fast there, Luke.

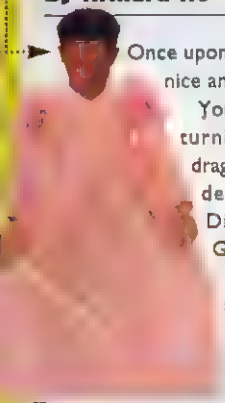
"You're saying—I should *give up* the dreams of my father because some down-on-his-luck Fed sells me out to a tabloid?" Murdock fires back. "I should have to give up my life? Become a Letterman punchline? You think I *like* this? I *hate* this!"

With "Hardcore" kicking off in April's *Daredevil* #46, emotions take a backseat to skull-thumpin' action. Bendis promises Daredevil's place in the Marvel Universe will be permanently altered once the story culminates with issue #50. "It's going to force his hand into changing how he operates as Daredevil," Bendis teases. "You get the return of Typhoid Mary after a 10-year absence, a couple of other classic villains and big, big, big fight scenes, which people have been waiting for very patiently."

If the chaotic fisticuffs promised in "Hardcore" are anything like the slow-burning intensity of recent arcs, Luke Cage better watch who he's calling names.

FABLES (DC/VERTIGO)

By Richard Ho



Once upon a time, I believed that all fairy tales were nice and sweet.

You know, bears eating porridge, pumpkins turning into carriages, heroes slaying the dragon—that kind of thing. Even the occasional death was sugar-coated with a gleaming Disney polish (the wolf didn't *really* eat Granny, right dad?).

So when writer Bill Willingham came along and stuck one of the Three Little Pig's heads on a bloodied spike, you could say my fantasy world was thoroughly rocked.

Welcome to the wonderful world of *Fables*, the Vertigo series that tosses traditional fairy tales down the rabbit hole.

Fables' premise grabs you from the start: classic fairy tale characters are driven from their storied homelands by the army of the mysterious Adversary and exiled in the real world among normal people (i.e., "mundies," short for mundane people). The citizens of Fabletown (the secret community living in New York City) are the characters we grew up loving, but with a modern twist. Snow White runs Fabletown as its bitchy director of operations. Prince Charming incessantly womanizes. Jack of the Tales (he's the guy who climbed abeanstalk) greedily scams anyone he can with a million get-rich-quick schemes. Goldilocks totes an assault rifle conspiring to overthrow Fabletown's leadership. And thanks to Old King Cole's General Amnesty Act, Bigby Wolf (formerly the Big Bad Wolf) atones for his past misdeeds by serving as Fabletown's sheriff.

So how does Willingham feel about messing with the Hans Christian Andersen and Brothers Grimm classics? "I have to confess, I've met a lot of scholarly type people in preparing for *Fables*," says the scribe. "People keep telling me that I have to have respect for these stories, and all sorts of scholastic nonsense. It might just be this reaction that put the old fables and fairy tales back in my mind. And the nice thing about folklore is that there's no right or wrong, so whatever I decide goes!"

Willingham chose to mix the classics with a heavy dose of realism, creating highly original—and often hilarious—takes on familiar characters. Seeing classic characters without the layers of kid-friendly pretense is an absolute hoot for a mundy like me. I love reading about Beauty and the Beast's marriage problems, the sisterly feud between Snow and her trouble-making sibling Rose Red, and Prince Charming's plan to get extra cash by raffling off his titles and land. I eat up the irony of Colin (one of the Three Pigs) constantly crashing on Bigby's couch, and I crack up when Pinocchio whines that he's doomed to never hit puberty and get laid. The more you read, the more you believe that this is *exactly* how fairy tale characters would act if they lived in the real world.

And there's plenty more to come. After wrapping up the recent "Animal Farm" storyarc (*Fables* #6-#10), which saw the nonhuman Fables in upstate New York lead a bloody and unsuccessful revolution to take back their homelands (you just knew Goldilocks packing heat would lead to no good), and the stand-alone issue #11, which finds Jack playing poker with the devil during the Civil War, Willingham rolls out a two-part caper focusing on Sleeping Beauty. After that, look for a four-part arc called "Storybook Love," which the writer describes as "my version of the whole 'live happily ever after' theme. Hopefully, it will completely pervert those old tropes."

Oh, and keep your eyes peeled, 'cuz there might be a death or two in the crystal ball—this time for real. "After opening the series with faking someone's death [Rose Red's apparent murder in *Fables* #1-#5's "Legends in Exile"], there's only so much you can be forgiven by doing something like that. So yes, there will be some actual 'we're not coming back' deaths in future issues."

I'm betting they won't be fairy tale endings, either.

SHOE-IN When the sh— hits the fan in *Fables*, Mother Hubbard and her crew are ready to throw shots.

GOTHAM CENTRAL (DC COMICS)

By Andy Serwin

If you're looking for the most arresting read in comics, your manhunt should end with DC's *Gotham Central*. Cops fascinate me, so comics starring cops usually find their way to the top of my reading pile faster than a speeding bullet. But even I wasn't prepared for how much I enjoyed DC Comics' latest Bat-title, *Gotham Central* by co-writers Greg Rucka (*Queen and Country*) and Ed Brubaker (*Catwoman*), with art by Michael Lark (*Batman: Nine Lives*). The book follows the detectives of Gotham City's Major Crimes Unit, and examines how regular Gotham police officers co-exist with Batman, who not only steals their thunder, but also thrusts deadlier enemies upon the all-too-human squad.

"Keep in mind, the GCPD is notoriously corrupt," notes Rucka. "It's a rotten department in a city of graft and corruption. Cops from other divisions use their informants to pin stuff on supervillains, and pawn the cases off on the Major Crimes Unit. What can you do when the guys below you don't want to do their jobs?"

When a cop story is done right, as it is in *Gotham Central*, the entertainment reward looms larger than a Most Wanted bounty.

COLD-BLOODED Ed Brubaker and Greg Rucka pulled off a miracle in *Gotham Central*—they made Mr. Freeze a chilling menace worth reading!

In my mind, it's a two-pronged attack to putting together a good cop story. One, you've gotta have a big cast of interesting characters. In *Gotham Central*, readers encounter 17 members of Gotham's MCU which handles not only violent crime, but also the city's costumed crazies. And while detectives Renee Montoya, Chris Allen and Capt. Maggie Sawyer may sound familiar from the other Bat-books, you also meet a more than dozen brand-new personalities—and that many characters guarantees plenty of conflict and drama.

Second, the cases better be interesting. So far, the MCU has taken on Mr. Freeze—who killed one cop with chilling apathy in issue #1—and Firebug, an arsonist setting fires all over the city. But it's a "run-of-the-mill" child kidnapping case spanning the first five issues that ties up one Gotham cop, Det. Marcus Driver, in knots worse than a Boy Scout shooting for his merit badge.

"When a veteran cop walks into a murder scene, he lights up a cigar and cracks jokes," explains Brubaker. "But in Gotham, when something's so horrible it gets through to them, you *know* it's ghastly."

If what's coming up in *Gotham Central* is any indication, I'm hoping the book will be doing a 25-to-life stretch. Brubaker finishes up his Firebug arc through issue #5, and then Rucka writes a five-part arc in issues #6-#10 where the storyline focuses on Det. Montoya, whose personal and professional lives take a series of shocking downward turns. "It's a story I've been waiting five years to write," says Rucka.

Further down the line, the two scribes will team up for issues #12-#14 in a story that rocks the status quo in Gotham City, and as Brubaker says, "will have consequences throughout the Bat-books" for some time to come.

Bottom line—If the boys and girls in blue set *your* blood to boiling, put *Gotham Central* in your lineup of usual suspects!

CAPTAIN MARVEL (MARVEL)

By Pat McCallum

He's insane, a cold-blooded murderer and will ultimately be driven to suicide by his madness. That, and he's the hero of the series.

Captain Marvel—the son of the late Captain Mar-Vell of the '70s—is an alien trying desperately to understand both his adopted home and the "cosmic awareness" (think "spider-sense" on steroids) that grants him the power to sense people and situations of great importance. And while the humor of series writer Peter David shines through (usually slapping you from left field during the darkest, most chilling parts of the series), this new Captain Marvel isn't laughing with us, but at us.

"I wanted to develop a take on him that would convey someone who is totally outside of our way of thinking, and I started thinking about, essentially, crazy people," says David. "Someone like a Hannibal Lecter. Those who have a reasoning process that is totally outside the norm, so much so that they almost come across as alien. We have no idea what they're going to say, or what they're going to do, or how they're going to think. That's Captain Marvel."

So what drove Captain Marvel from the doe-eyed "stranger-in-a-strange-land" alien from his last series to the new murderous psychopath of the relaunched series? Nothing. Or, at least, the decision to do nothing. Faced with two visions from his Cosmic Awareness—a young girl being beaten to death and, light years away, the bloody conquest of a world by alien invaders—Marvel chooses to do the greater good and fight back the invaders. As he battles the alien hordes, his visions show him the brutal death of the girl he chose not to save...a girl who would have grown to be the next messiah and brought peace to the galaxy. For Marvel—who has been struggling both with his role of cosmic protector and living up to the impossible standard of his heroic father—this is the final straw. Looking into the vastness of what is and what may be, the responsibility of it all weighing on his shoulders, the heroic icon that was Captain Marvel crumbles.

But Captain Marvel's pain is a reader's joy. Each issue is filled with insane "NO WAY!" scenes that kick, stomp and bury traditional spandex roles. With his fractured view of reality, Marvel strands his best friend/sidekick Rick Jones in the Microverse to die, murders his way into the Kree Empire's high command and—in one of the oddest and laugh-out-loud funniest pairings in recent memory—strong-arms a reluctant Punisher into teaching him the art of discipline. And that's just the start of the bigger picture.

CRAZY TRAIN Writer Peter David acts as conductor on Captain Marvel's journey through insanity.

"I'm trying to avoid the clichés of cosmic stories," David explains. "At the end of the issue #5, Captain Marvel and [cosmic entity] Entropy resolve that they are going to destroy the universe. In the usual kind of cosmic saga that you would read, the next issue would consist of [heroes going] 'Oh my God, we must save the universe!' But no. Issue #6 takes place after they've destroyed it. I like the notion that it's such a casual thing in the world of comic books, trying to destroy the universe. But you know what? Screw it. It's done. Let's move onto something more interesting. So issue #6 occurs after they've destroyed the universe, in which you've got Captain Marvel, Entropy, [Entropy's sister] Epiphany and Rick Jones. That's it. Just kind of standing there in this miasma of nothingness going, okay, now what?"

The "now what" includes future storylines where Captain Marvel befriends a mass murderer who wants Rick Jones dead, decides he's a god and moves to Asgard, and faces off against Spider-Man, which David titles "Gratuitous Crossover."

Jarring, often disturbing plot twists and unconventional storylines makes this "hero" the most unpredictable, riveting character in comics. If you're not reading *Captain Marvel*, you're the one who's crazy.

What's YOUR favorite out of the six books chosen? Go to wizardun.verse.com to vote and tell us what your drop-dead favorite book is

15 REASONS WHY 'X-MEN 2' WILL BLOW AWAY THE FIRST 'X-MEN' FILM

By the Wizard Staff

1 Wolverine kills. Almost. Kind of. Well, he maims a bunch of people who are left wounded and bloodied and might die without the proper medical attention.

2 Magneto leads the X-Men. In their most crucial time of need, it's *über*-baddie Magneto who aids the X-Men, not their fearless leader Professor Charles Xavier.

3 Guns don't kill mutants, people do. Unlike the first film's collection of mutant villains, humankind—led by its genocidal patriarch General William Stryker—spearheads the charge to rid the world of all things mutant.

4 Wolverine wears panties. A post-Weapon X program created a female version of Wolverine, with Deathstrike emerging as the femme fatale.

5 Because 20th Century Fox spent an additional $30 million this time. That $100-plus million budget equals more effects (over 800, according to director Bryan Singer), more sets (they built their own Oval Office!) and bigger fights (wait till you see Wolverine vs. Deathstrike).

6 Colossus comes to the rescue. With the X-Mansion under attack from Stryker and Co., it's up to the soft-spoken metal-head to help smack some human ass.

7 Cameos, cameos, cameos. Everyone from Kitty Pryde, Jubilee, Siryn, Leech and Beast can be seen—even if it is for a few seconds. Unfortunately, it's the human-looking Beast, not the blue furry version.

8 Wolverine gets some. Much to pretty boy Cyclops' chagrin, Wolvie busts a move on Jean Grey and plays some tonsil hockey with the brainy bombshell.

9 Because Bryan Singer says so. "This is a much darker film but in a fun, adventurous way," explains the director. "I hate to draw comparisons, but if I had to, this film is the 'Empire Strikes Back' of the 'X-Men' saga."

10 Tony Stark finances the deal. The plastic prison incarcerating Magneto actually bears a sign that says: "Do not tamper with panel without contacting Stark Enterprises." Let's drink to that!

11 Nightcrawler kicks Wolverine's ass. Well, they never throw down but *Herr* Wagner swipes Wolvie's thunder as the scene-stealing star of the film with his groundbreaking fighting style, ability to appear and disappear in a puff of smoke and his hard-core mission to kill the President.

12 The New Mutants debut. Pyro, Iceman and Rogue—our favorite teens in training—reunite onscreen for mischief and mayhem.

13 Sabretooth eats Toad. At least we think that's what happened, because neither of these stars of the original X-film sees the light of the day in the sequel.

14 Wolverine's real origin is revealed. He learns Stryker has ties to the Weapon X program, which made Wolvie the killing machine he is.

15 Halle Berry gets naked. Well, we really don't think she does in "X-Men 2," but after seeing her get her freak on in "Monster's Ball" and slink around in "Die Another Day," you can't blame us for hoping. There's always "X-Men 3"!

REASON #16 Nightcrawler moonlights as a tripod.

WOLVERINE

NAME: Classified

ALIASES: Wolverine, Logan

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: At large

AFFILIATION: X-Men

Ahhh... Wolverine. My Wolverine. This *animal's* remarkable healing factor allowed his body to take on any number of enhancements—and without the dreaded (and far too often) possibility of a subject's death, Wolverine always occupied a special place in my heart—and my laboratory.

Ruthless, cunning, vicious. I wouldn't have been surprised if Wolverine was reared by wild animals—only rarely would he break his quiet low gaze, exploding into a "berserker rage" that claimed the lives of two of my weakest men. Thank heavens we hadn't yet put the claws in him...

The day of the operation was the happiest and saddest of my life. His extraordinary healing factor easily compensated for the mutilation of his internal organs—as my beautiful adamantium became one with his bone marrow, Wolverine was born anew. I think we all cried tears of joy. That is, until he sprang from the tank and nearly massacred my entire staff. I barely got away alive, but he quickly disappeared into the wilderness. Over the years, we attempted to track him, and there were sightings across Canada and even as far away as Japan, but his survival instincts always kept him one step ahead of us.

Maybe one of these days, Wolverine will get a chance to thank me for what I've done to...*for*...him. But I'm not upset anymore...I would say that Wolverine was the most lethal killing machine I have ever met—or made. That is, until Yuriko (see Deathstrike) showed up.

CHARLES XAVIER

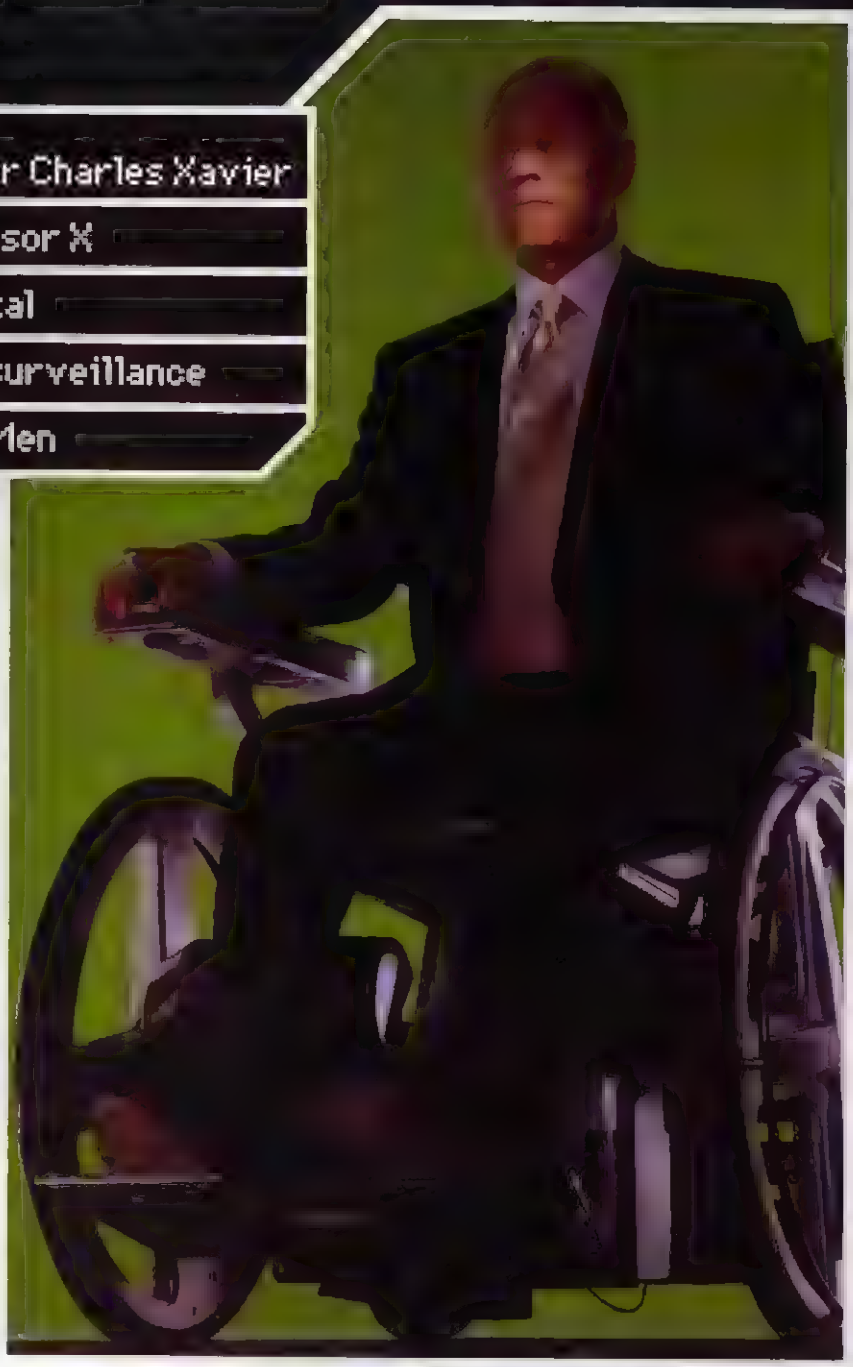
NAME: Professor Charles Xavier

ALIASES: Professor X

MUTATION: Mental

STATUS: Under surveillance

AFFILIATION: X-Men



Charles Xavier: professor of mutation. Unlike the rest of these mutants, Xavier is no child, and he should know better. But instead, he's running a school for these creatures, under the name of "Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters." And yes, I've asked him over and over to be honest and rename the school "Xavier's School for the Cursed." He thinks this is a joke.

I've seen the school up close and it's a sight to behold. Dozens of mutants running freely, openly displaying their powers as if it were fun. It was repulsive. I never got a look at the secretive lower levels of his mansion, where he keeps the advanced weapons and technology for his personal army, the "X-Men," but I hope to get a tour soon. Recent interrogation of Eric Lensherr (see Magneto) raised particular interest in a weapon they built together, something called "Cerebro." Supposedly, it amplifies Xavier's telepathic abilities, allowing him to tap into every person on the planet. Lensherr insists Xavier merely uses Cerebro to locate other mutants, but that he could easily kill anyone he desires by simply willing it. Imagine the possibilities.

Xavier is the leader of a dirty blot on this world, and he will fall. Soon. Sooner than anyone thinks, actually. He's more powerful than any mutant I have ever come across. Sure, Wolverine's healing factor is extraordinary, but Xavier could wipe his brain clean if he wanted to.

And that's the problem. No one can contain him. No one can control him. But I've found a way. I've found his match.

MAGNETO

NAME: Eric Lensherr

ALIASES: Magneto

MUTATION: Environmental

STATUS: Contained

AFFILIATION: Brotherhood of Mutants

In the early days of my career, before the word "mutant" meant much to the general public, our department was only tracking a handful of subjects around the world. One of those was Eric Lensherr.

While young, Lensherr didn't appear to be much of a threat. His ability to manipulate magnetic fields was interesting, but hardly dangerous. But almost overnight, reports flooded in from Europe of Lensherr lifting cars as if they were toys, or turning seemingly harmless pieces of metal into deadly shrapnel.

Eventually Lensherr met Charles Xavier (see entry), the two brought together out of a shared concern for mutantkind. I watched as they gathered others like themselves under the guise of "teaching" and "inspiring." Their friendship was strong, but Lensherr's more "aggressive" plans seemed to conflict with Xavier's. After their schism, Lensherr disappeared and took on the alias Magneto. Rumors circulated that he was forming his own radical group, much like Xavier's X-Men, but it wasn't until his attack on Liberty Island that I realized how prepared Lensherr was to start this war.

After his capture, my group was asked to develop a prison capable of containing him. It wasn't easy. An entirely new facility was constructed without an ounce of metal. A specially trained staff was screened, and those with tooth fillings or pacemakers were quickly weeded out. Despite the cost of keeping him contained, Mr. Lensherr has proven to be an invaluable source of information, and I can't help but smile when I realize that the man who hoped to be mutantkind's savior will ultimately bring about its extinction.

STORM

NAME: Ororo Munroe

ALIASES: Storm

MUTATION: Environmental

STATUS: Under surveillance

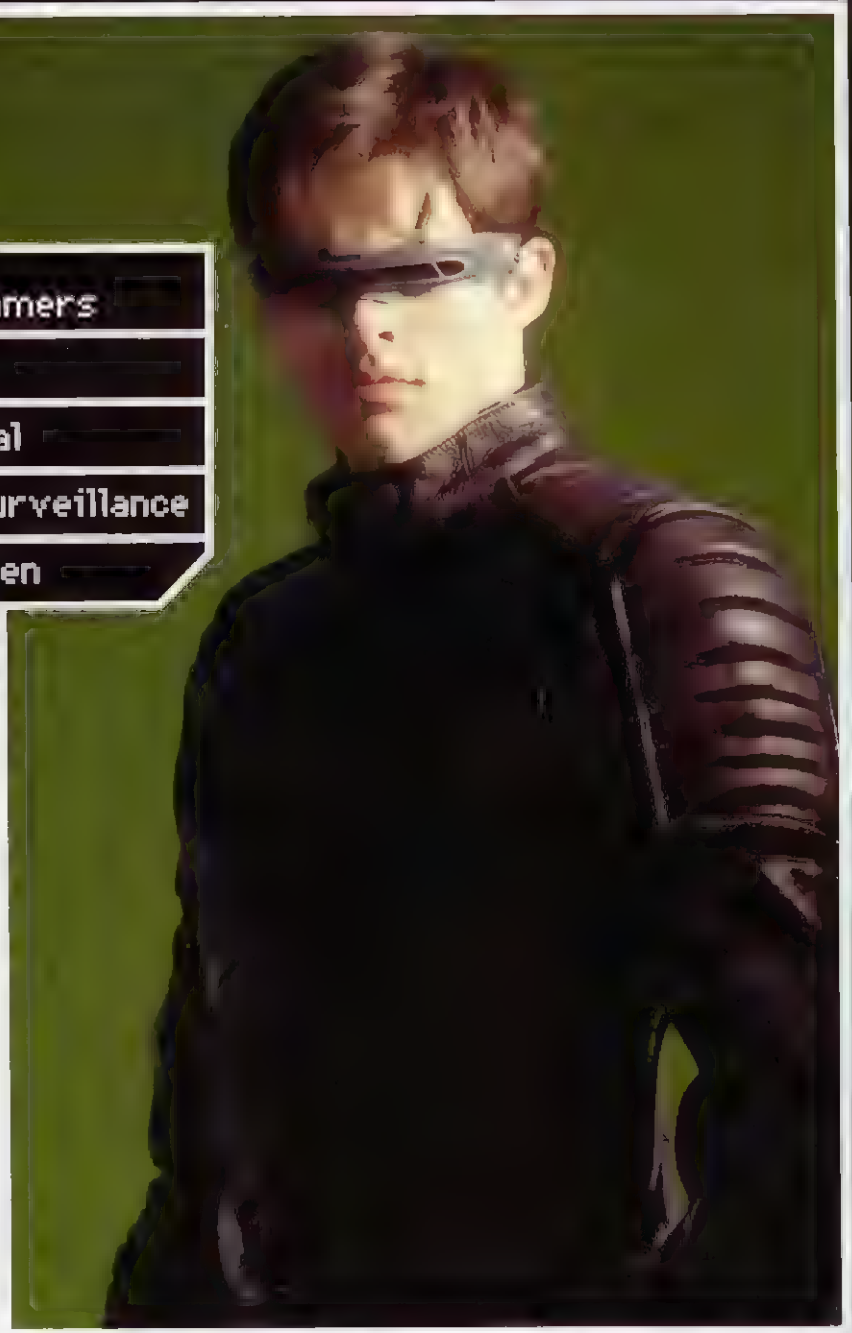
AFFILIATION: X-Men

When my department first heard of Ororo Munroe, I suspected she was another urban myth created by widespread mutant hysteria. I had encountered metamorphs, telepaths, clairvoyants and even teleporters, but the idea that a mutant could alter weather patterns with the slightest thought was unprecedented and seemingly impossible. Over time, reports of inexplicable meteorological events began to flood in from Kenya, Cairo, London, and finally New York, and our agents confirmed that a young woman calling herself Storm was terrifyingly real.

My fears were only compounded when it was learned that Munroe was now working as one of Professor Charles Xavier's teachers and as a member of his personal strike force, the X-Men. Storm's abilities have made Xavier's private army more powerful than ever. She has learned to wield various forms of weather-like destructive weapons, controlling bolts of lighting with astonishing accuracy and even summoning gale force winds, snow and possibly even tornados.

Because of such extensive powers, I've been working to piece together her past in search of a weakness or a possible way to use her skills for our own purposes. Unfortunately, what I have found is little more than scattered sightings mixed with unconfirmed rumors and legend. The best lead so far is from an agent in Kenya who found a small tribe that once worshipped a white-haired "weather goddess." Worshipping a mutant as a supreme being isn't an idea that I find surprising, but it is something that I find distasteful and cannot be allowed to happen again.

CYCLOPS



NAME: Scott Summers

ALIASES: Cyclops

MUTATION: Optical

STATUS: Under surveillance

AFFILIATION: X-Men

I was first able to observe Scott Summers when I made my first trip to Xavier's "school." His alias of "Cyclops" is no joke. Though he has the use of both eyes, Summers' power manifests itself into a powerful optic stream that spills forth from his eyes. The custom ruby quartz visor controls the beams, channeling them into a singular blast that he can control with a mounted dial. It's an astounding weapon.

Summers has an intimate relationship with Dr. Jean Grey, though it was impossible for me to tell if they were married at the time. It seems that after Professor X is gone (more about that later), Summers, Dr. Grey and Ororo Munroe (see Jean Grey, Storm) will be the natural successors to his throne. Won't that be an exciting day on campus?

Summers has a smug, All-American demeanor, and seems to be quite proud of the mutation that renders his face...well...*just look at his face*. It's hard for me to. This bio-mechanical freak can't blend in with his mutation—it's on display for everyone to see. I only wish that all mutants lived their lives like this...and were unable to hide the ugly truth.

If his visor was removed and his optic blast was used unfiltered, my scientists surmise that Summers could punch a hole through a mountain. Or Fort Knox or *the White House*. Recent damage to a train station in Westchester, NY, and to the Statue of Liberty may have been caused by such an event. What I wouldn't give to harness some of that power. Really, the possibilities are endless.

JEAN GREY

NAME: Dr. Jean Grey

ALIASES: Not applicable

MUTATION: Mental

STATUS: Under surveillance

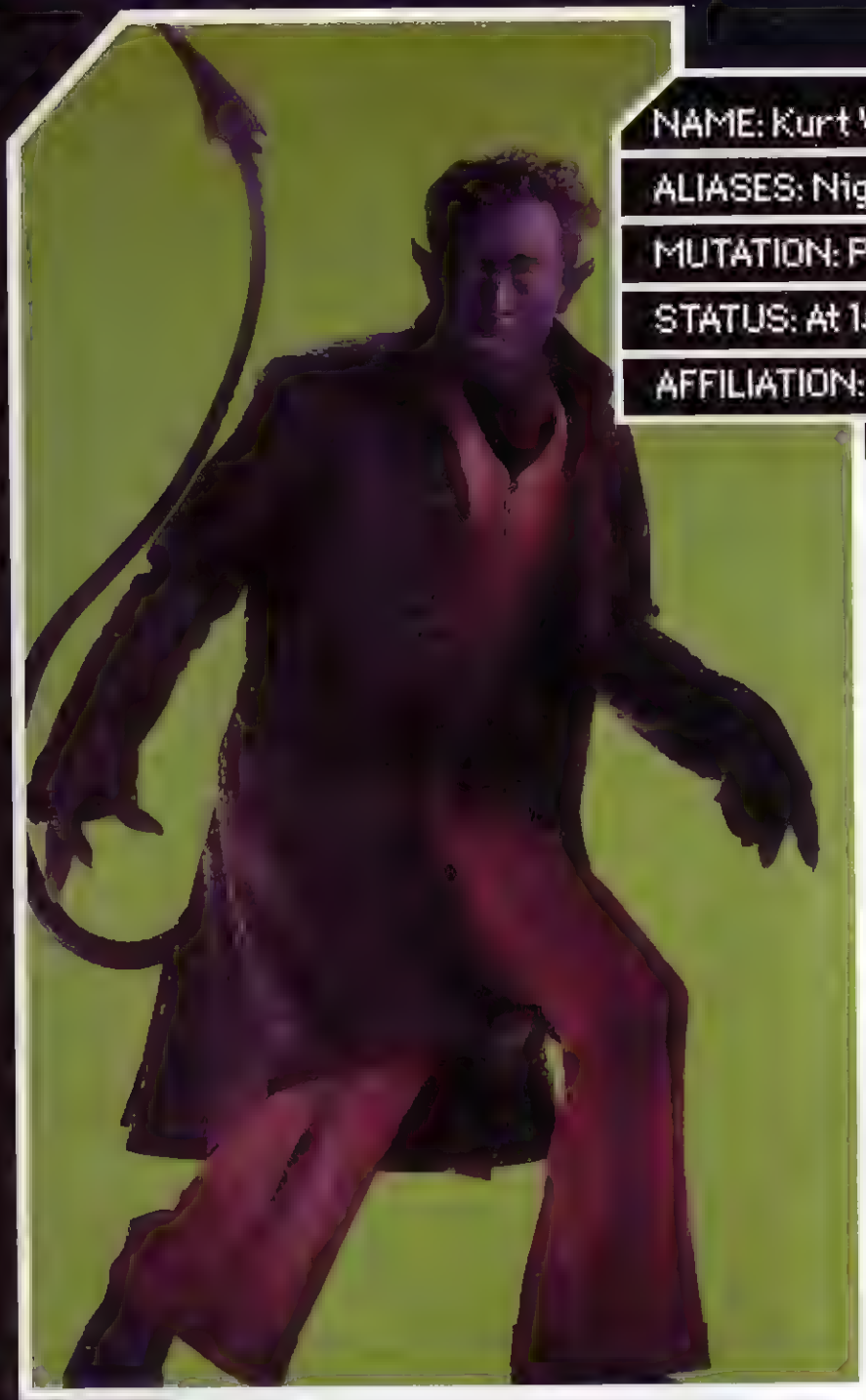
AFFILIATION: X-Men

Along with Scott Summers and Ororo Munroe (see Cyclops, Storm), Dr. Jean Grey was one of Professor Xavier's first students. In her public life, she continues to teach at the school, fostering the next generation of his "gifted youngsters" while also acting as an outspoken advocate of mutant rights. However, like the rest of her kind, I believe Ms. Grey's true nature has been kept well hidden.

As a key member of Xavier's mysterious paramilitary group, the X-Men, Grey is believed to have participated in conflicts with Lensherr's Brotherhood at the Westchester, NY, train station as well as the incident on Liberty Island. Her mutation has given her a combination of psychic abilities including telekinesis and telepathy, a rare mix I've not seen in any other mutants to date. While she lacks the traditional fighting skills of some of her teammates, Grey's mental abilities have proven useful in the field as both offensive and defensive weapons. Oddly enough, she has yet to choose a colorful alias like her cohorts have.

Out of all Xavier's troops, it is Dr. Grey that I am becoming most concerned with. Surveillance shows that her already impressive powers may only be in their early stages of development, and that if allowed to develop unhindered, these skills could prove dangerous not just to herself but to everyone around her. It is my belief that Xavier is well aware of Grey's potential and is purposely holding her back for her own safety, or plans on exploiting these untapped powers at a later time.

NIGHTCRAWLER



NAME: Kurt Wagner

ALIASES: Nightcrawler

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: At large

AFFILIATION: Munich Circus

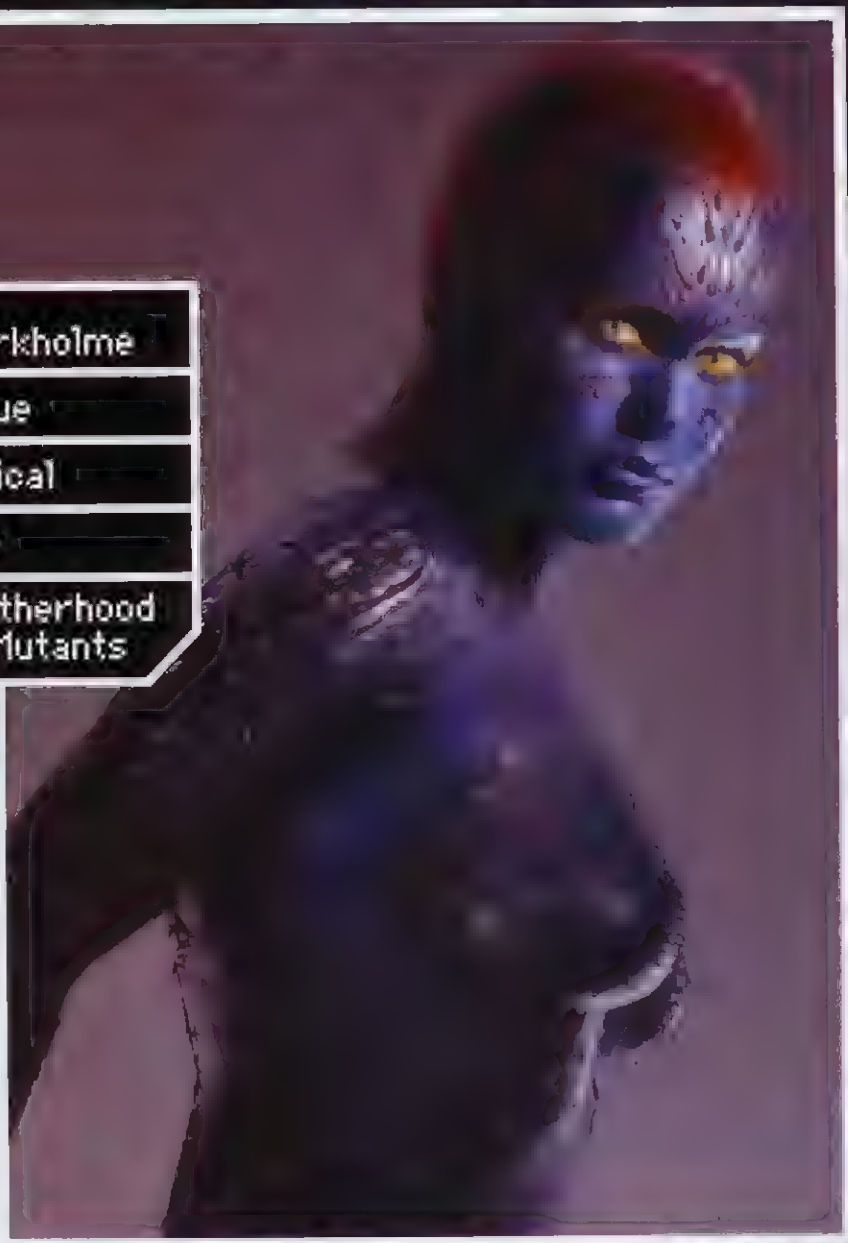
For years, I knew teleporting mutants existed, but their skills made them difficult to find, much less contain. Luck changed when an agent vacationing in Europe took his family to the Munich Circus, where the star was an acrobat billed as "The Incredible Nightcrawler." It was an ingenious disguise. With a physical appearance best described as demonic, a circus filled with other bizarre performers was the perfect way to hide in plain sight.

Not only did Nightcrawler display amazing acrobatic skills that I knew could come in handy for combat, his teleporting ability made him an excellent candidate for infiltration. We didn't have time to study the limits of his powers, but we do know teleporting with other individuals or objects isn't a problem. Still, he never seemed to transport himself out of his range of sight. Whether this is a physical limitation or a product of his own fear is unknown.

Unfortunately, my first attempt to recruit Nightcrawler was an utter failure, as his fellow performers were quick to protect him from my operatives. Luckily, his grotesque physical appearance made him easier to track than most mutants, who are often able to blend in with the general population.

After he fled the circus, we tracked Nightcrawler across Europe, as he took refuge in religious locations such as monasteries, convents, and abandoned churches. While he's still managed to evade us for the past few months, a recent tabloid reporting a "blue demon" terrorizing Boston leads me to believe The Incredible Nightcrawler's act may have finally reached American shores.

MYSTIQUE



NAME: Raven Darkholme

ALIASES: Mystique

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: At large

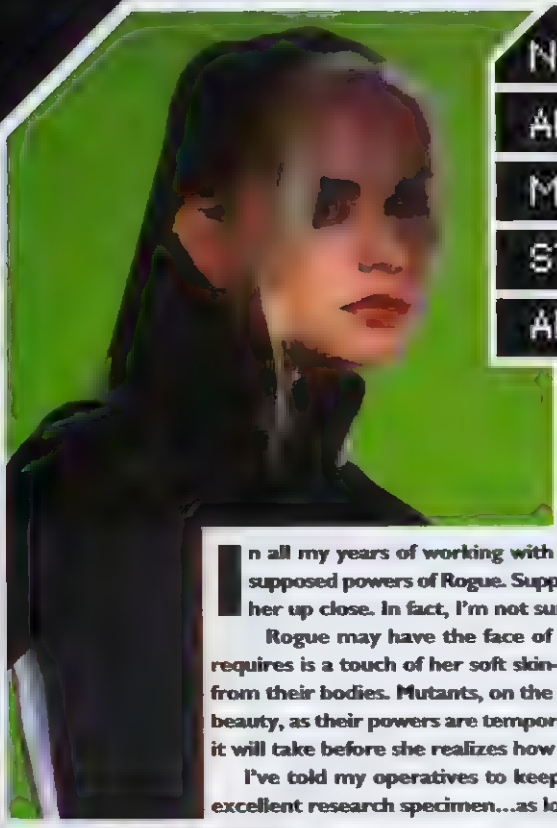
AFFILIATION: Brotherhood of Mutants

A metamorph as lethal as she is beautiful, Mystique is one of the most cunning and dangerous mutants I have ever encountered. While I've dealt with numerous shape-shifters over the years, none had the talent to replicate others with her impressive accuracy. What's even more amazing is how little effort it takes. Just a passing encounter gives her enough information to imitate someone with astounding detail. Able to alter her physical form at a molecular level, we know that Mystique can duplicate not just a person's outward appearance, but their fingerprints, voice and even retinal patterns. Combined with her skills in hand-to-hand combat, this would make Mystique the perfect undercover operative, and while I've made numerous efforts to recruit her, every attempt has resulted in the loss of more agents than I care to recall.

Fiercely loyal to Eric Lensherr (see Magneto) and his cause, Mystique played a key role in the Liberty Island incident earlier this year. With other members of the Brotherhood, she is believed to be responsible for the deaths of several police officers, museum guards, and most notably the murder of Senator Kelly's assistant, Henry Gyrich. Our forensic team even gathered evidence that she flawlessly impersonated Mr. Gyrich for as long as three weeks before the attack, completely undetected. Sadly, the good Senator has refused to cooperate with further investigations.

ADDENDUM: Mystique's distinct blue skin and yellow eyes have lead some of our medical staff to wonder if she may have family ties to one of our recent recruits, Nightcrawler (see entry), but until she's finally contained, we'll never know for sure.

ROGUE



NAME: Marie D'Ancanto

ALIASES: Rogue

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: Under surveillance

AFFILIATION: X-Men

In all my years of working with mutants, I've never encountered one with the supposed powers of Rogue. Supposed, that is, because I've never seen or observed her up close. In fact, I'm not sure *I* want to get anywhere near her.

Rogue may have the face of a china doll, but she's a killing machine. All it requires is a touch of her soft skin—and humans will feel their lives being drained from their bodies. Mutants, on the other hand, will lose their powers to this young beauty, as their powers are temporarily transferred to *her* body. I wonder how long it will take before she realizes how powerful "a touch of Xavier" could make her.

I've told my operatives to keep an eye out for young Rogue. She'd make an excellent research specimen...as long as we remember to wear gloves.

ICEMAN

NAME: Bobby Drake

ALIASES: Iceman

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: At large

AFFILIATION: X-Men

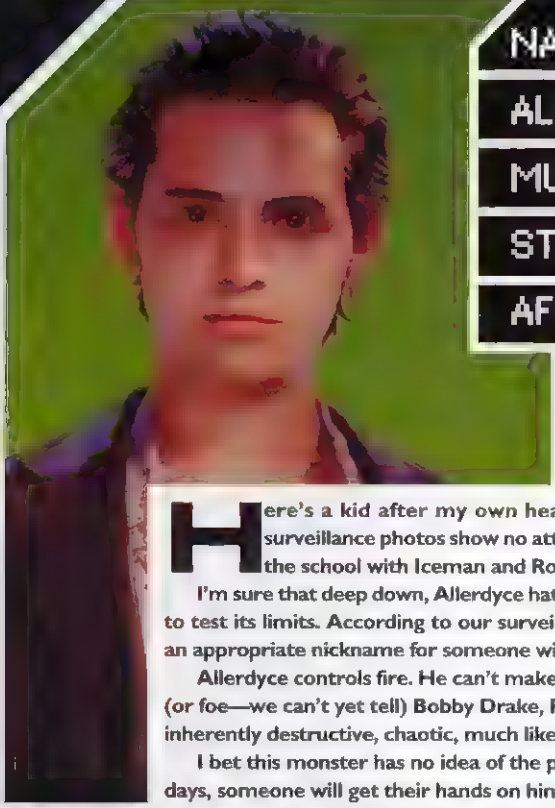
I don't know much about this boy—he's young and relatively new at Xavier's school. Drake's mutation allows him to create and control ice—I bet he's great at making snow cones.

Bobby Drake represents what's gone wrong with the American family. He's got a loving mother, father and brother. But don't let that face fool you—he's a monster. Surveillance photos gathered from the "school" show Drake in intimate situations with the one called Rogue (see entry). I wonder how that's done, given her mutation?

It's been reported that Drake is one to watch out for—that his power goes far beyond party drinks and ice skating. Some of my people even say he's capable of global environmental change—that the next ice age will come (or go) because Bobby Drake willed it.

I'll believe that when I see it.

PYRO



NAME: John Allerdyce

ALIASES: Pyro

MUTATION: Environmental

STATUS: Under surveillance

AFFILIATION: X-Men

Here's a kid after my own heart. John Allerdyce is a runaway, a loner. Our surveillance photos show no attachment to anyone—just a surface relationship at the school with Iceman and Rogue (see entries).

I'm sure that deep down, Allerdyce hates his mutation, but for now he's more than happy to test its limits. According to our surveillance, he's even dubbed himself "Pyro," which is an appropriate nickname for someone with his particular mutation.

Allerdyce controls fire. He can't make it, he can only manipulate it. But unlike his friend (or foe—we can't yet tell) Bobby Drake, Pyro's force is something to be reckoned with. It's inherently destructive, chaotic, much like his own personality and demeanor.

I bet this monster has no idea of the power he wields with his fingertips. One of these days, someone will get their hands on him and use Pyro for what he's built for.

DEATHSTRIKE

NAME: Yuriko Oyama

ALIASES: Deathstrike

MUTATION: Physical

STATUS: Contained

AFFILIATION: Classified

When Weapon X failed, Deathstrike was born. Only the second subject I've encountered with the healing factor first seen in Wolverine (see entry), Yuriko was a prime candidate for the augmentation process. There's a certain irony that her father helped me develop the procedure...if only he had lived to see how well it worked.

Yuriko's body adapted well to our enhancements, including an adamantium-laced skeleton that makes her virtually indestructible, and retractable blades hidden in each finger. I admit the obvious homage to Wolverine's design, but Yuriko's weaponry has a lethal beauty and grace that he lacked in every way.

Already a skilled fighter when she was first "recruited," Yuriko's reflexes have only become sharper. She's proven herself in the field time and time again, both as my bodyguard and as an operative in the war. In fact, I have yet to find a weakness. Her regenerative abilities allow her to sustain extensive, even mortal injuries, and still bounce back. In early tests, she would sometimes be mistaken for dead, lacking a heartbeat or even brain activity, only to completely heal in a matter of hours. On more than one occasion she's given our morticians quite the jolt.

It's a shame Wolverine isn't here to meet her. I'm sure sparks would fly.

Special thanks to "X-Men 2" screenwriters Mike Dougherty and Dan Harris for their help with this feature—they delivered Hollywood punch on a Congers budget!

Scott & James
2003

THE WIZARD Q&A:

geoff johns

This fanboy-turned-fan-favorite writer raps about why he prefers B-list heroes, his worldwide pursuit of a complete 'Flash' run and why he spurned Marvel for an exclusive three-year deal with DC

GEOFF JOHNS CAN'T WAIT TO QUIT COMICS.

At least every Wednesday afternoon. Shutting down his brand-new iMac computer at 2 p.m., Johns grabs the keys to his black 2000 Jeep Grand Cherokee, speeds out of his office parking lot and takes off down Ventura Boulevard for the 10-minute drive toward the Studio City area of Los Angeles. After a short stop at the bank to grab a fistful of cash, Johns continues on to a place only a select group of rabid comic pros find themselves in the middle of the week—their local comic book store.

"I can't wait for the comps I get [from publishers] in the mail," the recently married Detroit native says as he pulls into the parking lot of DJ's Universal Comics. "I want the books when they come out. Not a month from now."

Entering the trendy store, Johns looks more like a crack addict who's just discovered a new dealer than a professional comic book writer. Just like so many other fans that graze up and down the aisles of toys, comics and merchandise, Johns eyes light up when he sees what he wants. After grabbing new issues of *Queen & Country*, *Y—The Last Man*, *100 Bullets*, *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Batman*, it's on to the toy section for the new DC Direct and Marvel Legends figures. Before long, the wonder boy of superhero comics—who's put titles such as *The Flash*, *JSA* and *Hawkman* back on the map before landing an *Avengers* writing gig at Marvel—has run up quite a tab.

After a few hours of reading, Johns' new comics find their way into one of the 24 long boxes of comics the scribe keeps in his Sherman Oaks, Calif., home, and he finds himself back on the clock writing comics.

"I've got a complete run of *The Flash*," gloats Johns, who

By Mike Cotton • Illustration by Scott Kolins

recently inked an exclusive, three-year contract with DC Comics. "Everything from *Flash* #105 [the first ongoing issue starring the Silver Age Flash, Barry Allen] to my stuff."

But while his fanboy roots show through at the comic store (and even at home), Johns leads anything but a normal fanboy existence.

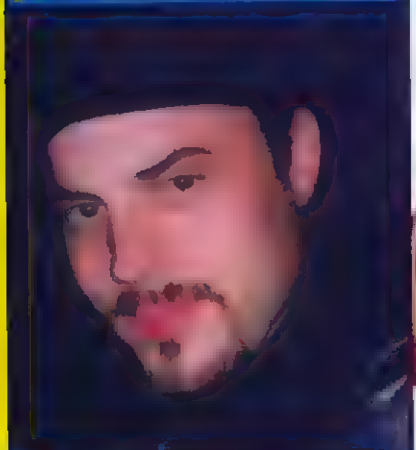
How many fans have actually *turned down* an offer to write an ongoing Superman title? How many comic book fans have had the "Superman" theme played at their wedding as DC Executive Editor Mike Carlin and Superman Group Editor Eddie Berganza looked on? How many comic book fans spent years working side by side with "Superman" director Richard Donner?

Few aspiring pros get to live the dream that Johns has been experiencing for the past few years. But as Johns explains, his dream didn't begin with Donner—it all began in a very unlikely place.

"I found an old copy of *Flash* #193 in my grandma's attic," chuckles Johns. "It's probably my most prized issue because that was one of the first comics I ever read. It was Flash fighting Captain Cold, which is why I like the character so much, I'm sure."

KNOW IT ALL

Five things you didn't know about Geoff Johns



1 Johns' first published work is 1988's *Star* and *S.T.A.R.P.E.* #9 for DC Comics, which [illegible] perfect the winning pitch.

2 His younger sister Courtney, who died in the TWA Flight 800 tragedy in July 1996, was the inspiration for *Star* in *Stars and S.T.R.I.P.E.*

3 Johns credits much of his storytelling style to his five years working as the assistant to filmmaker Richard Donner ("Superman: The Movie," "Lethal Weapon" franchise).

4 Johns' first Hollywood experience: Working on 1997's "Conspiracy Theory" as director Donner's right-hand man.

5 An unabashed B-level characters, Johns would love to tackle a *Cloak & Dagger* mini-series sometime in the future. WK

WIZARD: Is it true you've got a complete run of The Flash?

JOHNS: That's the only comic that I actually set out to collect a complete run of. I mean I've got some runs of other stuff, but nothing that complex. And I bought all the Silver Age issues back when I was a kid in the '80s, so I don't think I spent more than 20 bucks on an issue. So they were relatively cheap. But it's all there. And they're not all in mint condition, of course, but I don't really care about conditions.

As sort of a collector-turned-pro, are there any past writers that inspired you that you grew up reading their stuff?

God, past writers...I mean, John Ostrander was one of my favorites I guess in the '80s and '90s. I wish he'd do more work now, but *Suicide Squad* and *Spectre*, even *Firestorm*, they were all terrific books. He was probably my favorite, him and Mark Waid; I grew up reading his *Flash*. It's the truth. And *Animal Man*, I remember buying *Animal Man* in high school. That's great stuff. Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* was a huge book to me. And Peter David's *Hulk* way back in the day. You know, when he first started on *Hulk*, it was awesome. So, you know those are some of the guys I grew up reading and I really liked.

How much time per week do you spend writing comics?

Probably about 40 to 50 hours. At four titles, I set aside a week per book on average. In order to really immerse myself into that, I'll just shift my whole mind onto the scene of the book, onto that world the book's in. With *Avengers*, I'll just immerse myself in *Avengers* for a whole week, or if I'm on a roll, I'll do it for two weeks and write two

AVENGERS (MARVEL) There's plenty of Avenging that needs doing this spring, as April sees Part Two of the six-issue "Red Zone" storyline by Johns and penciller Olivier Coipel, which forces the Avengers to face a biological threat on U.S. soil. After that, look for a stand-alone tale in #70 focusing on Yellowjacket and Wasp's relationship before the beginning of "The Search for She-Hulk" storyline in issue #71, which will see one new member join the Avengers' roster...and another one bite the dust! "Coipel's bringing a whole new level of energy and excitement to the Avengers," says Johns of the former *Legion* artist.

scripts, you know back to back. And then, the good thing about working on four titles is that I never get writer's block because I'll always just move on to a different title...If don't feel like writing *Avengers*, I'll move on to *The Flash* and I'll write *The Flash* that week. So that's the best thing about it.

Writing four titles a month, are you ever concerned about becoming burned out or repeating themes?

Yeah.

How do you avoid it?

By not writing five titles a month. [*Laughs*]

Do you ever think you could ever handle five books?

I could do it for maybe two months, but that's it. Because I don't want everything to suddenly suck. I mean it's like not everybody bats 1.000 anyway, but if I'm doing more than a book a week, I'm not going to be able to bat .500 or hold whatever I'm batting now. It's just not going to happen.

Do you ever find yourself writing something for JSA and then saying, 'I'd rather use this for Avengers' or vice versa?

JSA (DC COMICS) The Golden Age heroes get a little tarnished by internal conflict starting in April. Co-written by Johns and David Goyer, with art by Leonard Kirk, issue #47 is Part Two of the "Princes of Darkness" storyline, as Mordru and Obsidian's attack on the JSA continues, which leads into July's huge *JSA* #50. Issues #51 and #52 serve as an epilogue to that saga, then Wildcat faces down Crimson Avengers' guns in issue #53. Beyond that, look for a JLA/JSA Thanksgiving dinner in *JSA* #54. "It's kind of a 'Virtue and Vice' follow-up, where the JSA and JLA have Thanksgiving dinner but no supervillains attack," says Johns. "They're surprised when nothing happens." After that, look for the return of a Golden Age character in #55. Then in issue #56, a new *JSA* crossover with *Hawkman* kicks off titled "Black Reign," a six-issue story in which Johns says the JSA has a civil war. "It's going to shake the team up a lot," reveals Johns. "After a civil war, you kind of *have* to shake things up."

I haven't done it yet. I'm sure there will come a time when I have an idea where I don't know what scenario works better. But, it seems like [the upcoming *Avengers* story] "Red Zone" would never work in *JSA*. The same the thing with [the *JSA* #32-#37 arc] "Stealing Thunder." I don't think would work in *Avengers*. It's just different schematics. So far, I've haven't run into a story where I can kind of interchange it

There was talk of you taking over one of the Superman titles after Jeph Loeb left. What happened?

[DC] kind of talked to me about it, but I never actually said yes. I was too busy. I told them I could do...[*pauses*] I was originally going to do two issues only to help out with scheduling and that turned into four because they needed a little bit more time and I decided to help them out. So it's just a matter of being too busy and I didn't think it was the right time for me to jump onto Superman.

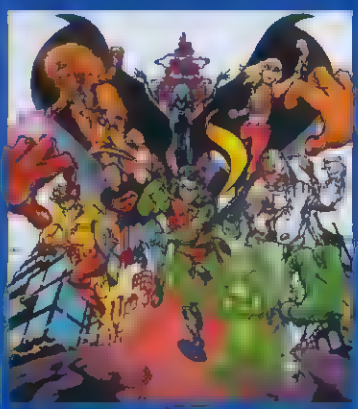
Is doing a stint on Superman important to you? Is it even something you want to do?

Yes, someday, sure. It'd be fun, you know? Someday, whenever the time is right. A lot of it has to do with timing. A lot of telling a good Superman story is how people respond to him. They have to respond differently to Superman than they would Firestorm or Scarlet Witch. And it's how he shows up—Superman's got to make a kickass entrance. You can have Scarlet

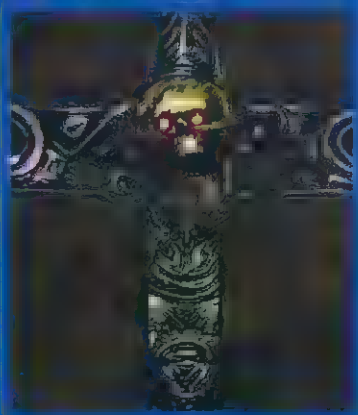
COMING SOON

Geoff Johns has a lot on his plate in the upcoming months. Take a look at some projects you'll be seeing later this summer:

TEEN TITANS (DC) Launching in July, Teen Titans is a place where teenage superheroes can be themselves and hang out on the weekends, explains the author. "The first week and is kind of the first try-out," says Johns. "Deathstroke does not want these characters to get together." The first arc, titled "A Kid's Game," will redefine many of the new members, including Impulse, Superboy and Beast Boy.



THE DARKNESS (WILDSTORM) Co-written by long-time friends Kris Oprisko ("The Haunted") and Johns with art by Lee Sharp (*Incredible Hulk*), *The Possessed* is a six-issue, mature readers series from WildStorm coming out this summer. "Basically, picture Linda Blair from *The Exorcist* growing up, 20 years old, and she teams up with three other people who were all possessed when they were young," explains Johns. "They become this kind of high-tech SWAT team of exorcists. It's pretty cool. It's very different than anything else that I've done." **EMC**



Witch walk into a room and start talking, but Superman, he can't do that. I'm sure I've done it but you're not supposed to. Superman's got to make a grand entrance. You've got to be like, "F---, holy sh--, it's Superman!"

Few people thought after Mark Waid left The Flash that it would continue with such success, but you proved them wrong. JSA has been reinvigorated and Hawkman's back. But The Avengers is the first A-list book that you're doing. Do you have interest in doing other top books like X-Men or Batman?

Maybe someday, yeah, but I prefer working on the second-tier guys. I don't know, maybe because there's not as much that you *can't* do with them. I can put Flash through almost anything and I can change the supporting cast, his villains, everything else and nobody really watches over your shoulder. Same thing with *Hawkman*. I mean, it's like whatever you want to do. With *JSA*, [DC] literally kicked us a box of the Golden Age characters, going, 'Whatever, we don't care.' There is something fun about that because you can make these characters evolve and grow and I like that; you're not on a tight leash. Having said that, it'd be great to write Batman or Spider-Man, it would be a blast. But I really do like working on the characters that are a little bit under the radar. That's why in *Avengers* I brought Ant-Man and Falcon in, because I like working with characters I don't have to worry about. I love writing Captain America and I love writing Iron Man. They're great characters, but I can't just write *those* characters.

Is there any major difference between writing for Marvel and DC?

They both give you a lot of freedom and they both give really good input. I love to work with [*Avengers* editor] Tom Brevoort, I love working with all the guys I work with at DC. Just the biggest difference to me is probably just the universe itself that I'm working in. Marvel always feels like, and no one says this directly, but it always feels more connected to the real world, where DC is more representative of that. Things are represented in [the DC Universe], whereas Marvel is much more literal in the real world sense.

You've got mini-series starring the Thing and Vision to your credit. Are there any other solo characters you'd like to tackle in a mini?

The Thing and *Vision*, as much fun as I had on them, they didn't sell very well at all. Which is like a lot of Marvel mini-series at the time and they shut down the whole mini-series division. But it all depends on what the character is.

I'd love to do a Crimson Avenger [from *JSA*] mini-series. I'd love to do a Captain Cold mini-series, too. Beyond that, I like ongoing character development. And also, for a mini-series like with the Thing [*Thing: Freakshow*], right when I was writing issue #4, I was like "Oh yeah, I really got into Ben Grimm." But it always takes me awhile to get into the character. You know Vision, it was cool because right when I got into the character, around issue #3, I was like "Oh cool, I get to use *Avengers* like a follow through." But it's tough; it takes me a little while to get into the character's head

You're also a big proponent of each title having very different

THE FLASH

(DC COMICS) In April's *Flash* #197, the Scarlet Speedster races for his life at the beginning of the four-part "Blitz" storyline with the return of Professor Zoom, the Reverse-Flash! "At the end of issue #200, Wally has to make a decision," reveals Johns. "The result shatters his life in a way no one suspects." Issue #201 launches an entirely new direction. "Any DC fan should check out *Flash* #201. If you thought the whole Hal/Kyle controversy was big for *Green Lantern*, wait till you read this."

themes. What are the themes for each of your books?

JSA is obviously legacy. *Avengers* is trust. *Hawkman* is basically history. History with people, history with places, history with events, how history affects us from day to day. And then with *Flash* right now, for me *Flash* is kind of a dual theme. It's speed, he can always fight more than one guy at once, but also I'm trying to go for blue collar, kind of a theme to the whole world. It's motion—you know, the blue-collar people make the city run and they make the country run. It's all up to the normal people that are doing really hard work and hard lifting, not the guys wearing the ties.

In terms of Avengers stories, when your run is all said and done, is there a story from past creators that you would like to top or equal?

I think Roger Stern wrote my favorite *Avengers* story, "Under Siege" [*Avengers* (vol. 1) #273-#277] which I think was a brilliantly done story and especially because it didn't use the main Avengers, but it was awesome. You know, I like the core Avengers like Scarlet Witch and Vision and all of them. But he used Hercules and Black Knight, you know all the other outsiders and he told a great, great story. But, you know I'm not setting out to top any story or top any creator or anything like that. I hope I tell a story. I hope that, by the end of my run, one of my arcs is remembered like that. I hope it's remembered as, "Oh, that was a really cool *Avengers* arc." Because there have been quite a few. But, you know I'd like one of mine to join that list of "That was a really cool Avengers story." I'm hoping "Red Zone" [**see sidebar on p. 88**] will be it.

How will your new DC contract affect Avengers?

My *Avengers* run will be cut short but it'll go through issue #76, which I think is the end of the year.

Y'know, I would have loved to do Hulk, Spider-Man or Captain America solo, but I'm glad I got to do *Avengers*. I think I'll have a 20-issue run when I'm done—that's not too bad. The only thing I'll miss doing is my Masters of Evil storyline. I think Tom Brevoort and I came up with a killer storyline, and now it's not going to see the light of day. Maybe in three years.

Why go exclusive with DC?

The main reason was because I'm writing a ton of stuff and I need to focus my energies. By doing all these outside projects everywhere else, it's taken me away from making sure my monthly books are my priority.

HAWKMAN (DC COMICS)

The Hawks fly the coop when Hawkgirl finally confronts her parents' killer in April's *Hawkman* #14. Written by Johns with art by Donald Kramer, this ish sees both Hawks out for blood and wanting the perpetrators dead. But that leaves only one question: Who gets to do the honors? After that, look for the return of the Thanagarian Hawkwoman in issues #15-#17, which will guest star Animal Man. Johns also has plans to develop a complete timeline for the Hawks from the Golden Age to the duos' current incarnations. "It's only about four pages long and it's all done from Hawkwoman's point of view. Hopefully, this will answer any remaining questions about where they come from to where they are today. After this arc, you'll know where we're going–we're going to spell it all out." After that arc, look for a JLA story featuring the Atom, and then an issue with Black Adam where Adam makes Hawkman an offer that he doesn't want refused, which leads into a crossover with *JSA* in 2004.

When I heard where DC was heading and it made me the offer, there was too much excitement for me not to do it. And DC gave me my start in the first place.

I should also point out that *Ekos* with Mike Turner isn't affected by this contract.

Why do you choose to work with collaborators such as Mike Turner, JSA co-writer David Goyer and James Robinson on Hawkman?

It's really fun to work with people. I love sitting in my office and writing alone at times. I like writing *Flash* alone and getting through *Avengers* and just spending a week and writing. But there's something really fun about meeting David [Goyer] for dinner and talking about the issue, and we outline 22 pages and we goof around and come up with cool ideas and bounce ideas back and forth. We shoot down each other's ideas, too. Then we split the script in half, and obviously it's less work too, but it's a lot of fun to hang out with friends and work on a comic. With David, I don't think we've had one problem ever. *JSA* has been smooth sailing. So, it's been pretty great.

Are there any creators out there that you haven't had a chance to work with that you'd like to?

I love [*Daredevil* artist] Alex Maleev. I think he's awesome. I'd love to work with [*Queen & Country* writer Greg] Rucka. Just because I think I would learn a lot from working with Greg. He's such a smart guy and he writes with such a passion that I'd love to experience some of that.

Which writers impress you most today? Who's doing their definitive work right now?

Oh right now? Jesus. There's a sh--load of them. I like so many guys. I like [Brian Michael] Bendis. [Greg] Rucka. [J. Michael] Straczynski's doing a great job on *Amazing Spider-Man*. Jeph Loeb, I love his *Batman*. I love all his mini-series. [***EDITOR'S NOTE: Geoff's kissing up a bit here, since he shares office space with Loeb.***] I like Mark Waid's take on *Fantastic Four*. I love Ed Brubaker's *Catwoman*, it's a great book. Brian Azzarello on *100 Bullets* is awesome. Brian Vaughan, whatever he's doing is awesome. And I'm probably going to forget like 30 of my friends.

I'm going to tell Mark Millar you left him off your list...

Wait, I love *Ultimates*! You bastard!

Staff Writer Mike Cotton's family lineage is a little bit more convoluted than just "You bastard!", but not by much

EKOS (ASPEN) One of superstar artist Mike Turner's (*Fathom*) two new projects, *Ekos* could launch as early as August (if fans decide that's the book they want Turner to tackle first–see p. 36 for more details.) "Ekos is about a far-off world in the future that's basically evolved into a segregated society, where everyone lives their lives their own separate ways," notes Johns. "But the world becomes united when there's an alien invasion. And you'll see what invades this world–humans. The series kind of focuses on Grell, who is labeled a doomsayer because he's seen a vision of this invasion."

PEACE OF THE ACTION

Marvel shines the spotlight on real-world peacemakers and how they hope to improve the world in '411'

Marvel ... constitute the publisher's weapon of choice.

On April 11, the House of Ideas will release ... anthology series titled 411 (referring to the ... code for "information"). Each issue features a collection of uplifting stories, true and fictional, about the peacemakers of the world—everyday people dedicated to abolishing war and violence. The basic premise behind 411 is finding non-violent solutions to ... world," says co-writer Chuck Austen, who penciled the ... to be about to see in this preview.

Adds Marvel President and ... co-writer Bill Jemas, "We're ... about real world heroes. People who help keep the peace ... people who clean up mine fields, people who extend olive branches ... help every day of their lives. With the newspapers filling ... with stories about suicide bombings, massive retaliation and ... escalating conflict, we thought Marvel should dedicate some pages ... information about people who are finding peaceful solutions ... these problems."

... pitched up ... a number of ... Mark Millar, ... Jemas explained how ... had affected his work. ... explains Jemas. "He could no longer ... those easy ... stories where ... building gets knocked over in ... the ... deal with the fact that the building ... to come down, a lot of times and destroying everything in its ... path ... and ... something ... to ... prevent that sort of destruction.

... of the emphasis on ... stories, ...

YAD VASHEM HOLOCAUST MUSEUM, JERUSALEM. TODAY.
BLOW UP
Bill Jemas & Chuck Austen Story
Chuck Austen Scr pt
Phil Winslade Art
Chris Chuckry Color
Randy Gentile letters
Mike Raicht editor
Joe Quesada Chief
Bill Jemas President
Everyone stay together, please.
Moshe, don't wander off. Pay attention to me, all right?
We're going to start with the Hall of Names --
-- which commemorates the names and biographical details of our fellow Jews who perished during the Holocaust.
What I want you to do is find your name somewhere in the pages of testimony --
-- either first name or family name -- whichever you can -
-- if you can't find yours, find the name of a family member or close friend.
Not that I want you to skip over the other pages --
-- but I find that the Hall has more meaning when we can relate to the events in them
-- through personal connection, and --

Hurry, children!
Into the back of the building. Move quickly, please!
PLEASE, VITA, WE MUST HURRY!
COME AWAY FROM THERE!

KWHOOM
HATZOR AIR BASE
NEAR ASHDOD.
Hello, Zayde. A personal visit on the tarmac?
What did I do wrong this time?

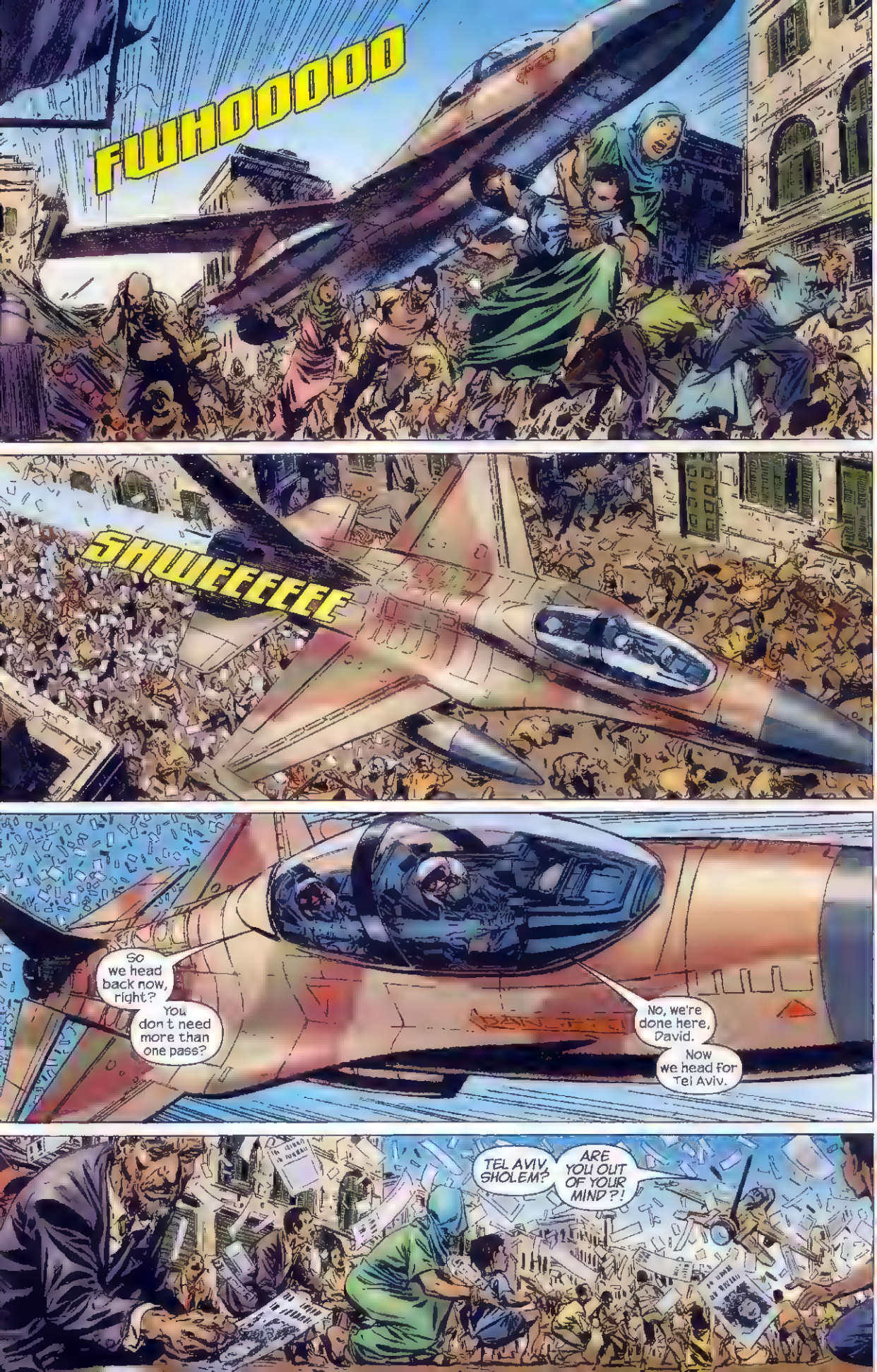
What is it, Zayde?
What's wrong?
981
852
Is it my wife?
Please tell me it's not Vita.
Not my little girl.
There were only four killed. Two soldiers, the teacher and your daughter, Vita.
It could have been much worse.

No, Aunt Hannah.
Nothing could be worse than this.
I'm sorry, Sholem. I didn't mean to trivialize...
I just meant --
-- I was simply trying to --
I know what you were trying to do.
But a Palestinian madman has taken my daughter from me *forever*.
Nothing can make me feel better about this.
Nothing less than an eye for an eye.
No, Sholem, *please*.
Chaim told me the man was from a small village outside Nablus.
He has family there, and I have the means to take revenge.
No, please, my love. *PLEASE!*
This will only escalate --

That's my job, to escalate matters.
And to protect our people from --
But more people will die!
Then maybe they'll finally STOP!
I'M A SOLDIER --
You're my HUSBAND --
-- and I don't want the blood of someone else's children on your hands.
MOSSAD HEADQUARTERS.
I was hoping you could help me with this, Abram.
I don't know, Sholem.
I could get into trouble for something like this.
You could be killed attempting it.
They killed the light in my soul, Abram.
Vita... my little girl... she was everything to me.

Something has to be done to put an end to it.
I need the intel on that village and I know you have it.
HATZOR AIR BASE.
You can't do this, Sholem.
You're talking about flying deep into Palestinian territory... and for what?!
A personal vendetta?
I have to do something, David.
And right now, I don't care if I get shot down, or killed or taken out by Palestinian flak.
It may as well be for something I truly believe will make a difference.
You know I'm right, David. My only question to you before I get on board is --
-- am I going to have to fly this thing alone?

A SMALL CITY OUTSIDE NABLUS.
Fresh Pomegranates?
They're excellent, I assure you. I picked them myself this morning.
No, I bought some of the ones you had a few days ago and they're not ripe enough yet.
FEEEEEEEEE
What's that sound?
Like someone...
...screaming?
FEEEEEEEEE
What is it?
What's--


FWHOOOOO
SHWEEEEEE
So we head back now, right?
You don't need more than one pass?
No, we're done here, David.
Now we head for Tel Aviv.
TEL AVIV, SHOLEM?
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?!

TEL AVIV.
No ice cream! You know what it does to you.
But I can hold it
I won't embarrass you.
It's not the embarrassment. I said no, and I meant --
EEEEEEEEEE
- no.
FWOOM
Close your eyes.
Don't look.
Close your eyes.
SHEEEEEEEE
Come here to me.
Come here to me, my darlings.
I love you.
I love you both SO much.
FLIP
FLAP
SKIP
SWP
SHLAP
THWP

YOU KILLED MY DAUGHTER
OUTSIDE NABLUS.

OUTSIDE NABLUS.
TEL AVIV.
I COULD HAVE KILLED YOURS.
WE MUST STOP NOW, BEFORE YOU KNOW MY PAIN
END
PICK UP #11 #1 ON SALE IN APRIL!

MEAN GREEN DEBUTS

You'll LOVE him when he's angry—even Lou Ferrigno approves

It's official. Not only does "Hulk SMASH!," but he's a smash with the fans, too!

Judging by online reactions from the highly anticipated Super Bowl trailers—the first time anyone got to see the top-secret CGI Hulk in tank-tossin' action—it's clear that June 20 (when Universal Pictures and Marvel Studios' "Hulk" debuts in theaters nationwide) isn't getting here fast enough for fans of Marvel's misunderstood monster. If you happened to miss the television spots, check out the official "Hulk" movie Website (**www.thehulk.com**), or simply check out these awesome screen captures from the fine folks at Universal Pictures. ■ **CASEY SEIJAS**

HULK REVEALED Adam Fogelson, president of marketing for Universal Pictures, recently said in published reports that the January debut of the CGI Hulk served a different purpose than simply showing what the Hulk looks like. "Until you give people some sense of what the character is and how the character functions, it's impossible to see the film," said Fogelson. "It was time to take that question off the table."

PARENTAL APPROVAL So what has the expert been saying about the look of the movie Hulk? "I think he's cute," original '70s TV Hulk Lou Ferrigno recently said in published reports. "He's like a futuristic King Kong. I thought it looked great, close to the comic character."

HOLLYWOOD AND TV STUFF THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

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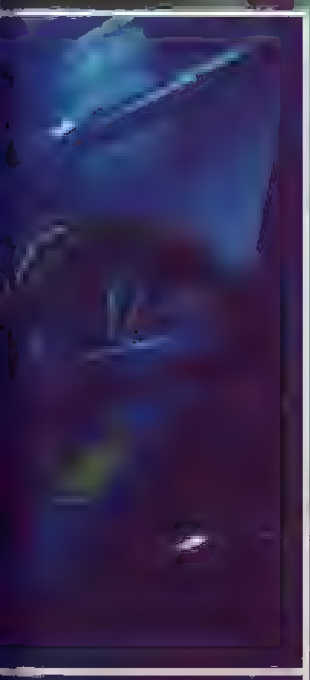
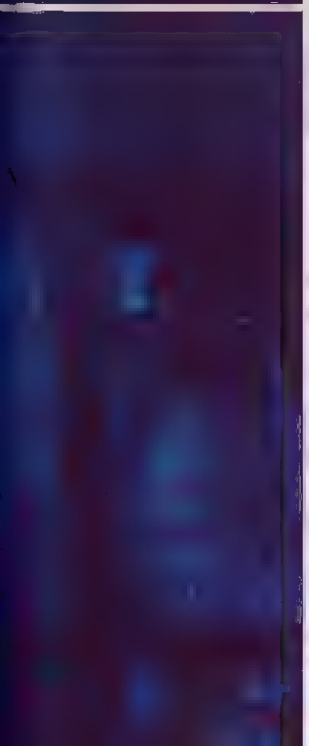




NO GREEN GRINS According to Fogelson, the CGI Hulk can hold his own with the rest of the actors. "The Hulk really performs in the film," said Fogelson. "The Hulk really has attitude and emotion. [Director] Ang [Lee] and everyone else at Industrial Light and Magic are spending 24 hours a day refining and perfecting everything."

TRAILERS...

AMERICAN SPLENDOR The film version of Harvey Pekar's biographical comic won the Grand Jury Prize for best drama at January's Sundance Film Festival.

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS Sandy Frank Entertainment is in the process of preparing a new "BotP" animated series and packaging eight "BotP" 75-minute features to be sold to TV for a fall 2003 start.

CATWOMAN With Ashley Judd now seemingly out of the running, Warner Bros. is reportedly courting Nicole Kidman to star in Selena Kyle's big-screen adventure.

CHASING ALICE Former *Uncanny X-Men* scribe Scott Lobdell has written and will executive produce a series pilot for The WB! called "Chasing Alice," in which a Scotland Yard detective travels to New York and encounters real-life versions of characters from "Alice in Wonderland."

CONAN "Matrix" creators The Wachowski Brothers are reportedly back on board to produce Warner Bros.' "King Conan: Crown of Iron."

THE CROW 4 Edward Furlong ("Terminator 2") will star in the third "Crow" sequel as the avenging spirit, this time taking on a group of Satanist bikers.

DEATHLOK According to Marvel Studios' Avi Arad, the script has been completed and is currently housed at Paramount Studios.

DICK TRACY An animated series has been reported to be in production.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS In addition to their "G.I. Joe" and "Transformers" DVD sets, Rhino Entertainment will release an interactive "D&D" DVD featuring episodes from the classic '80s animated series.

FANTASTIC FOUR According to Marvel Studios President Avi Arad, director Peyton Reed ("Bring it On") has officially signed on to helm comics' first family's first theatrical feature. The WWE's Trish Stratus is rumored to be seeking a role.

HELLBOY Creator Mike Mignola has revealed that the film will play up the father-son relationship between Hellboy and Professor Bruttenholm (the scientist who discovered Hellboy in the 1940s) more so than in the comic. Actors Larry Miller and Victoria Smurfitt have left the project, with Jeffrey Tambor ("The Larry Sanders Show") and Biddy Hodson ("Bedazzled") replacing them.

INTERMAN Paramount Pictures has optioned Jeff Parker's graphic novel for co-producers Gail Anne Hurd ("The Hulk") and Ford Lytle Gilmore's Illuminati Entertainment production company.

IRON MAN "Alfred Gough and Miles Millar [creators of "Smallville"] are on board to write 'Iron Man,'" said Arad. "They wrote 'Spider-Man 2' and we had a great experience with them." The duo will reportedly start from scratch with their script. Leonardo DiCaprio is rumored to in the running to star.

MAN-THING "'Man-Thing' is in preproduction, actually in storyboarding," relayed Arad. "We'll begin in May. Brett Leonard is directing; he did 'Lawnmower Man.' He's really a special effects-savvy guy. It's going to be nice and scary." The film will take the slant of Man-Thing as more of an urban legend and will shoot in New Orleans.

MUTANT X Yes, the rumors are true: Freddie Prinze Jr. has written a "Mutant X" episode, titled "One Step Closer." The episode will air during May syndication sweeps, but won't feature an appearance by Prinze.

NAMOR The Sub-Mariner looks to be swimming to theaters soon. "David Self ['Road to Perdition'] is writing it," said Arad. "We are very close to having the script."

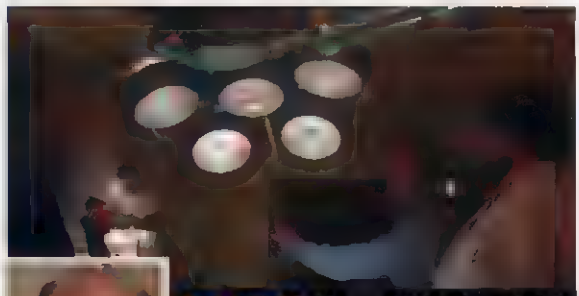
NICK FURY According to Arad, "Blade III" writer/director David Goyer will pen a "Nick Fury" draft for Dreamworks after completing his Blade workload.

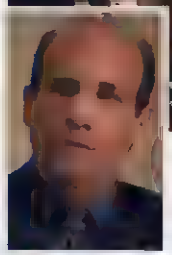
PUNISHER Screenwriter Michael Tolkin ("Changing Lanes") has been recruited to rewrite director Jonathan Hensleigh's script. According to Arad, "This is going to be a 'Road to Perdition'-like movie."

SPIDER-MAN 2 At press time, we heard a rumor that Jake Gyllenhaal ("Donnie Darko") will cameo as Kletus Kasady, setting himself up for a larger role in the third Spidey flick.

DEVILED EGGS

"Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson prides himself on being a fanboy at heart. To prove it, he's packed the DD movie with more comic book Easter eggs than you can shake a poorly disguised billyclub at! Here are the ones we caught...





DEVIL DAWGS Smith's cameo (right) and the rapist called Quesada (inset) are one of at least a dozen cool comic Easter eggs in "Daredevil."

1 Young Matt Murdock stops an old man from walking out into the path of an oncoming car, thus saving his life. The old man in question? None other than Daredevil co-creator Stan Lee!

2 Frank Miller, the legendary *Daredevil* writer/artist, also scored a brief cameo as one of Bullseye's many victims (the guy whose motorcycle Bullseye steals)—he's credited as "Man with pencil in forehead."

3 The final comic pro to get a bit part in the film was former *Daredevil* scribe and indie film auteur Kevin Smith. He played a coroner named Kirby (named after Marvel legend Jack Kirby).

4 And as if the cameos weren't enough, all the boxers Jack "The Devil" Murdock fights were named for past and present *DD* writers and artists: John Romita, Frank Miller, David Mack and Brian Michael Bendis.

5 The priest Matt Murdock confides in goes by the name of Father Everett, a shout-out to Daredevil co-creator and original artist Bill Everett.

6 Marvel Editor-in-Chief (and former *Daredevil* penciler) Joe Quesada also had the dubious distinction of giving his name to one of the film's characters—José Quesada, a rapist who Daredevil leaves on the subway tracks to die.

7 Quesada (the character, not the artist) testified that he picked up his victim at "Josie's Bar & Grill," a seedy mainstay from the *Daredevil* comic series.

8 Michael Clarke Duncan's Kingpin cribs a line straight from Frank Miller's "Born Again" storyline when he says, "A man without hope is a man without fear."

9 Another sequence lifted directly from the comic book page is the death of Elektra. Bullseye says, "You're good, but me—I'm magic." He then slices Elektra's throat with a playing card, saying, "And for my next trick...," impaling her on her own sai. The scene was taken verbatim from *Daredevil* #181.

10 The opening shot of Daredevil embracing a cross on top of the cathedral was also taken from the comic book page—this time from the cover of *Daredevil* (vol. 2) #3, as drawn by the completely legitimate Joe Quesada.

11 If you heard rapper Coolio was to appear in the movie, he was. But you'll only see his name in the credits, since his subplot was removed from the final cut. But director Johnson says the 20 minutes of footage the rapper appears in will be seen in the "Daredevil" DVD due out later this year.

12 Did you leave before the credits finished rolling? If so, then you missed an extra scene with everyone's favorite assassin, Bullseye. He's laid up in a full-body cast and pestered by a fly. The camera cut to the outside of the room and suddenly the fly stopped buzzing. It then cut back inside to show a syringe pinning the fly to the wall. "Bullseye."

■ JOSHUA ELDER

STUFF

LOADING THE MATRIX

'Enter the Matrix' blurs the line between films and video games

There's no denying that 2003 is the year of The Matrix. Two adrenaline-soaked sequels, the definitive Special Edition DVD, the "Animatrix" series of animated shorts—it all seems pretty overwhelming. But if the teaser trailer for "Reloaded" and "Revolutions" made you sweat, just wait until you get a controller in your hand. That's right—*Enter the Matrix* invades PS2, GameCube and Xbox consoles everywhere this spring.

STAND OFF Agent Smith is fascinated by Niobe's hair

The Wachowski Brothers, Larry and Andy, the multimedia masterminds behind the epic silver screen trilogy, never planned for the story to begin and end at your local cineplex or DVD player. As avid gamers themselves, they realized that the ultimate rush would stem from the audience being able to assume an integral role in humanity's last-man-standing struggle against the machines, taking the passive experience of simply watching the movies into a truly aggressive, interactive realm.

SLAP HAPPY A baddie feels the back of Ghost's hand.

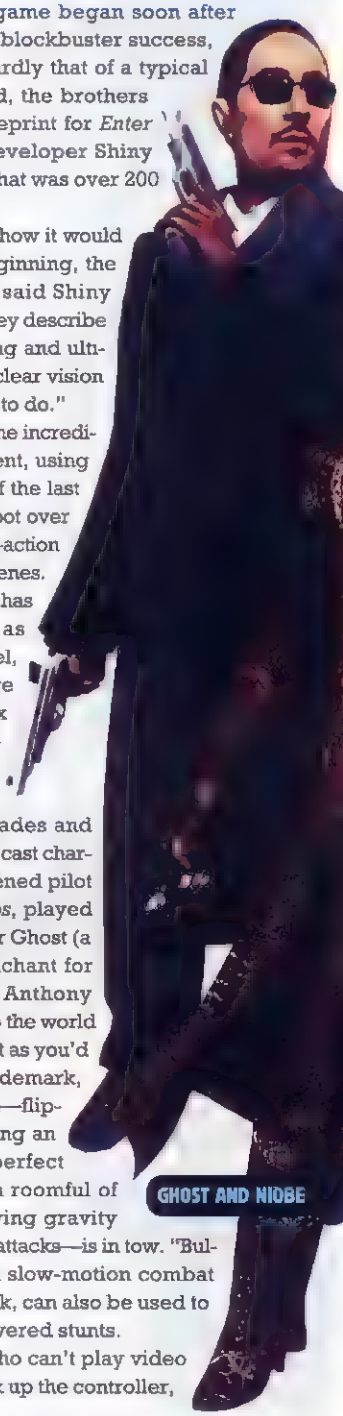
Production on the game began soon after the first film opened to blockbuster success, but the process was hardly that of a typical licensed game. Instead, the brothers devised a massive blueprint for *Enter the Matrix*, handing developer Shiny Entertainment a script that was over 200 pages long.

"They knew exactly how it would all fit together—the beginning, the middle and the end," said Shiny founder Dave Perry. "They describe things in terms of feeling and ultimately they had a very clear vision about what they wanted to do."

The duo also made one incredibly daunting commitment, using more than $20 million of the last two films' budgets to shoot over an hour of exclusive, live-action footage to insert as cut scenes. Actor Lachy Hulme, who has limited screen time as Sparks in the first sequel, wryly remarked, "I have three scenes in 'Matrix Reloaded,' but I spent 14 months working on *Enter the Matrix*!"

Donning the hip shades and leather threads of newly cast characters Niobe (the hardened pilot of the human ship *Logos*, played by Jada Pinkett Smith) or Ghost (a Zen-master with a penchant for firepower, played by Anthony Wong), players jack into the world of "The Matrix." And just as you'd expect, the trilogy's trademark, techno-revved kung-fu—flipping off walls while firing an assault rifle, landing perfect roundhouse kicks on a roomful of Agent Smiths and defying gravity with 2,000 other combo attacks—is in tow. "Bullet-time," the patented slow-motion combat styling from the first flick, can also be used to perform particularly fevered stunts.

"We want people who can't play video games to be able to pick up the controller,



GHOST AND NIOBE

SPIN-O-RAMA Ghost catches a poor cop by surprise.

press the buttons, and feel really good," said Perry, who is confident that his team has succeeded in translating the high-intensity action of the films into the game. "On the other hand, we don't want them to feel like it's just a button-masher, so we've been working hard to make sure that somebody who is a good gamer can start pulling off a bunch of cooler moves."

Along with the fast and frenetic hand-to-hand combat, which encompasses the majority of the game, players can also pilot the *Logos* through the human world while fending off pursuing sentinels, accelerate through the downtown streets of "The Matrix" in a beat-up Towncar, and even unlock hidden paths by hacking into the computer's mainframe via an old school text adventure.

And the similarity to the movies doesn't stop there. Neo, Morpheus and Trinity (played by Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, and Carrie-Anne Moss, respectively) all appearances. And while they aren't playable in the game, the mainstay freedom fighters are featured in exclusive, unlockable film footage as well as levels throughout your journey to save the last mortal city, Zion. The design work of comic book artists Geof Darrow and Steve Skroce, among others, was also referenced to render the mechanical aesthetics of the Logos and the sentinels accurately, and even Yuen Wo Ping, the fight choreographer for the movies, was tapped to bring authenticity to the combat engine.

"We worked hard to make the video game part of the movie," producer Joel Silver said. And it shows. When *Enter the Matrix* hacks its way onto into your living room this spring, it won't be just another game, but an extension of a whole universe.

At least that's what the Wachowskis are betting on.

■ JON M. GIBSON

videorumblings

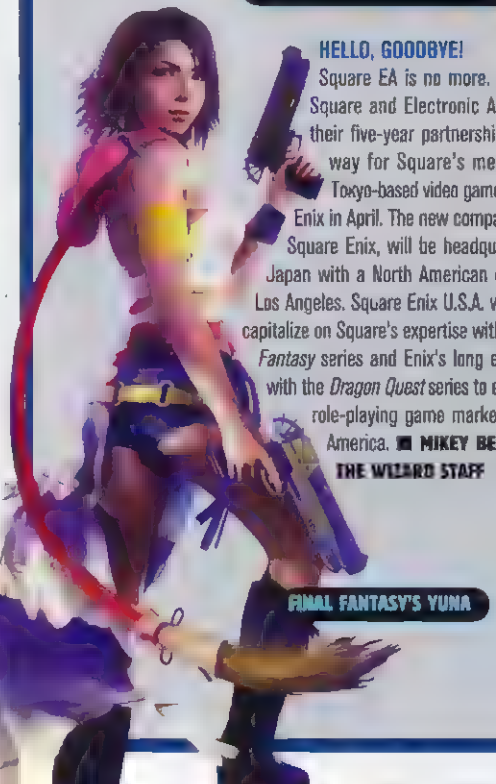
BITS AND BYTES!

'SUPER' NINTENDO The man in Red and Blue has been flying high in virtual Metropolis lately. In addition to Midway's *Justice League* and Atari's latest *Superman* offerings for the Xbox and PS2, Mr. Kent has his heat vision squarely aimed at Nintendo's GameCube. Even with the success of *Shadow of Apokalips* for the PS2, Infogrames wants to make sure their version of the Man of Steel comes through with flying colors. That's why the company has taken six months of extra development time, along with plenty of fan advice, to tweak and adjust any aspect of the game that's not so super, like an improved camera system and upgrading the sound to Dolby Pro Logic II. Look for Supes to finally leap to the Cube in spring 2003.

PRIME TIME...AGAIN! Talk about letting the space pirate outta the bag! Nintendo has announced that Retro Studios will be bringing interplanetary bounty-hunting babe Samus Aran back to Tallon IV (or some other nightmare of a planet) to do battle with beasties in *Metroid Prime II*. How do you improve on what some have dubbed "the greatest video game ever made?" We say multiplayer, baby!

SAMUS FROM METROID PRIME

HELLO, GOODBYE! Square EA is no more. In March, Square and Electronic Arts ended their five-year partnership, making way for Square's merger with Tokyo-based video game publisher Enix in April. The new company, called Square Enix, will be headquartered in Japan with a North American division in Los Angeles. Square Enix U.S.A. will look to capitalize on Square's expertise with the *Final Fantasy* series and Enix's long experience with the *Dragon Quest* series to expand the role-playing game market in North America. ■ MIKEY BENCK AND THE WIZARD STAFF



FINAL FANTASY'S YUNA

manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

IMAGE LOOKS EAST

Declares April 'Manga Month' with four new comic launches

April ain't just for practical jokes any more. Image Comics declares the month as "Manga Month" and launches four new manga-influenced books to celebrate.

According to Image's Director of Marketing Eric Stephenson, it just made sense to devote a whole month to manga, especially after the publisher received multiple pitches from new creators for manga-influenced mini-series. Given that manga and anime have become hot commodities in recent years, it's no surprise that Image wanted a piece of the action.

"Manga doesn't rely on 30 or 40 years of history," explained Stephenson. "There's a freshness to it that probably comes from the fact that the creators producing manga aren't content to simply redo comics they enjoyed during their youth. And I think kids typically want something they can call their own, which I don't think mainstream American comics have been giving them for some time now."

Until now! Check out *Wizard*'s guide to these four hot new series.

THE AGENTS (Six-issue mini-series by Ben Dunn and Kevin Gunstone)
Thirty years after Washington and Moscow were obliterated in nuclear strikes, the world's safety lies in the hands of the men and women of the Agency, a planet-wide group of protectors operating out of Britain. The Agency uses espionage and cloak-and-dagger tactics to enforce world peace. But in a world of uncertainty, there are those who will stop at nothing to take the Agency out of the game—permanently. **(April 30)**

HEIRS OF ETERNITY (Four-issue miniseries by Jose Torres, Jae Tsai and Jim Royal)
Love and hate combine to form a double-edged sword that can cut both ways. Five different beings take up this "sword," and each discovers that sometimes the greatest enemy is the one within. As their lives gradually spiral out of control, the five collide amidst a tempest of the darkest emotions of the heart. As war between Heaven and Hell rages, they will learn that what lies within can be just as powerful and deadly as anything of the divine or the damned. **(April 30)**

ROTOGIN: JUNKBOTZ (Eight-issue miniseries by Jay Lee and J. Korim)
In a cyberpunk future, gear head Kaylin Dakota calls the mega city of Nalus Toyocom home. But the "city of rings" is also home to a more sinister group of citizens—the ever-growing criminal organization U.B.B. The U.B.B. runs dangerous, illegal battle robot tournaments. When Kaylin discovers her friend has fallen into a crime lord's debt, Kaylin builds her battle bot and enters the U.B.B. Fighter's Circuit to save him. It will take all of Kaylin's considerable talent—and a good deal of luck—if either of them is to survive. **(April 23)**

SOUL OF THE SAMURAI (Four-issue bimonthly miniseries by Will Dixon)
A young samurai undertakes a spiritual quest to gain the ultimate enlightenment, forsaking his rank and his honor to attain his goal. His sojourn is a difficult one, for he must face four inner demons, each representing a different part of his soul. But when even victory brings pain and torment, the samurai will learn that sometimes what one seeks is not worth the cost. **(April 30)** ■ CAITLIN MORIARITY

I AM SAMURAI This touching series stars a mentally challenged samurai learning the ropes of real life. Or not.

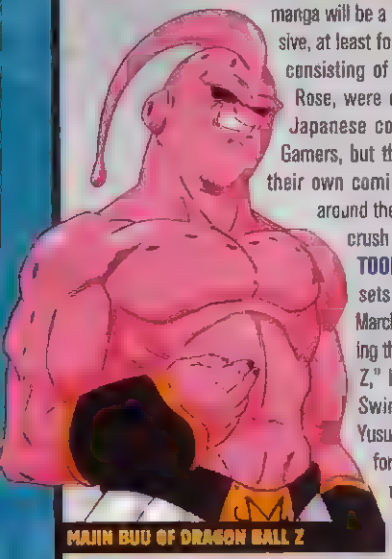
ANIME BUZZBOX

GO! GO! GO! If the Miyazaki DVD news weren't enough (see story this page), it turns out that "Speed Racer" will be driving onto DVD April 11 as well. Billed as a limited edition, this DVD contains the first 11 "Speed Racer" episodes, as well as "Limited Edition Rubber Tire Packaging," which is marginally better than "Limited Edition Trunk-suffocated Chim-Chim Packaging," we guess.

DREAMIN' NEON

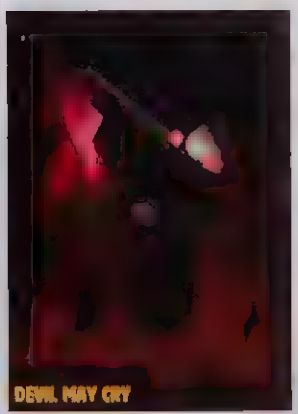
DREAMIN' NEON A brand-new comic book series based on the wildly popular Neon Genesis Evangelion franchise? In your dreams–Dreamwave, that is. The publisher is rumored to be working on a deal with ADV to produce the first-ever Evangelion comics in the U.S.

CHARAT CAKE Viz announced that their translations of the preposterously cute and bizarre *Di Gi Charat* manga will be a Borders and Waldenbooks exclusive, at least for a while. The *Di Gi Charat* crew, consisting of Dejiko, Puchiko and Rabi-En-Rose, were originally cute mascots for the Japanese comic/video game store called Gamers, but they proved so popular they got their own comics. Most of the books revolve around these small, big-eyed girls trying to crush each other's dreams.


MAJIN BUU OF DRAGON BALL Z

TOONAMI'S A-COMIN' Keep your TV sets glued to Cartoon Network this March. Not only will they finally be showing the last 13 episodes of "Dragon Ball Z," but "Yu Yu Hakusho"–the Adult Swim hit about school delinquent Yusuke who dies, is resurrected and is forced to take on refugees from the underworld as a spirit detective–will move to the Toonami slot, too.

BIRD WATCHING Sandy Frank Entertainment is telling anyone who'll listen that they're bringing back "Battle of the Planets" (a.k.a. "Gatchaman," a.k.a. "G-Force," a.k.a "Eagle Riders") to TV. Tentatively dubbed "Battle of the Planets: The New Exploits of G-Force," the series will use the original 1972 Japanese anime with "new footage." Which hopefully doesn't mean the American-made robot and killjoy, 7-Zark-7.

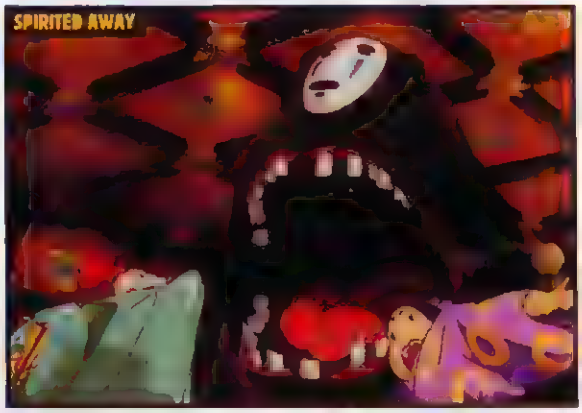

DEVIL MAY CRY

CAP COMICS Fans of *Devil May Cry* can wipe away the tears–according to the rumor mill, at least two sources are vying for the rights to turn the popular Capcom game into a manga.

■ THE *WIZARD* STAFF

MAKE MINE MIYAZAKI

Disney does anime DVDs right


SPIRITED AWAY

Hayao Miyazaki has been called the Steven Spielberg of Japan. He works exclusively in animation, his last film ("Spirited Away") is the highest-grossing non-American produced film in the world, and only a few of his works have ever come to America on DVD.

Until April 15, that is. On that day, Disney subsidiary Buena Vista will release not one, not two, but *three* of Hayao Miyazaki's modern anime classics—as two-disc special editions!

"Castle in the Sky" (a.k.a. "Laputa"), "Kiki's Delivery Service" (previously available on home video) and "Spirited Away" will make their DVD debut, doubling the number of Miyazaki/ Studio Ghibli films available on American DVD. Each two-disc set features their English dub, a 5.1 Dolby Digital original Japanese language track and a horde of extras including storyboards, voice talent featurettes, original Japanese trailers, an introduction by John Lasseter (director of "Toy Story" and "Toy Story 2" and adaptor of "Spirited Away") and more.

"Kiki's Delivery Service" tells the story of a young witch who sets off on her own when she turns 13. With her talking cat Jiji, Kiki becomes the witch for a small town, helping a local bakery deliver its goods. Anime fans should note that this will be the first time "Castle in the Sky" has ever been available in any form to American viewers. Based loosely on *Gulliver's Travels* and set in a retro-future, the young boy Pazu finds a girl named Sheeta floating gently through the air with the help of a magic pendant. Chased by air pirates and a treacherous government agent, Sheeta and Pazu must uncover the mystery of the pendant and discover the secret of Laputa, the floating island.

Contender for Best Animated Feature in this year's Academy Awards, "Spirited Away" is the critically acclaimed tale of a young girl named Chihiro who wanders into a dark wonderland with her parents, who turn into pigs. Chihiro has to find the strength to survive and rescue her parents from the clutches of the witch Yu-Baba.

All three movies have topped anime fans' DVD wish lists for some time. And if these do well, Disney/Buena Vista has plenty more Miyazaki films to import to a nation of rabid anime fans!

■ ROBERT BRICKEN

CHIHIRO OF SPIRITED AWAY

SECRET STASH

comics' hidden gems

SKINWALKER

WHEN A SERIAL KILLER CHANGES HIS APPEARANCE WITH THE SKINS OF HIS VICTIMS, WHO CAN BRING HIM DOWN?

THE DIRT An FBI special agent and a stubborn small-town cop must halt a cross-country killing spree perpetrated by a killer attempting to revive a sadistic Native American ritual. The skin hits the fan in Oni Press' *Skinwalker*, shipping in an all-new trade paperback on March 26.

DOYA LIKE? *Skinwalker* combines the best elements of TV shows like "The X-Files" and movies like "Silence of the Lambs," making this a unique thriller that'll have you second-guessing even your most trusted friends.

DIDJA KNOW? Creators Christina Weir and Nunzio DeFilippis made their bones as screenwriters, writing episodes of HBO's "Arli$$" and the Disney Channel's "Kim Possible." However, they openly admit their newfound love of comics. "Comic writing has been the most creatively satisfying," says Weir. "In TV writing, you're lucky when your episode airs, and there's maybe 10 percent of your original ideas in there."

They should've thought twice before writing *Skinwalker*.

Despite the fact that series creators Nunzio DeFilippis and Christina Weir's tale of a cross-country manhunt for a skin-nabbing serial killer had the entire *Wizard* staff drooling with anticipation for each new issue, the husband-and-wife writing team ran into unforeseen opposition before ever pitching the story to Oni Press.

"The Navajo people neither like to or want to talk about ritual skinwalkers," explains DeFilippis. "The desecration of a dead body is strictly taboo in their culture. They believe you don't touch dead bodies, you don't look at them, you bury them and you're done with it. So the skinwalker, by virtue of skinning dead animals and the ritual itself, is considered a taboo subject. Then we take it one step further by having our skinwalker use a human being for the ritual."

Despite the controversy, the writers, along with artists Brian Hurtt (*Queen & Country*) and Arthur Dela Cruz (*Kissing Chaos*), took the chance, crafting a chilling story underscored with a revealing glance into the Navajo culture. If you missed out on last year's *Skinwalker* mini-series, Oni's got you covered with an all-new trade paperback, available in comic shops now.

A murder mystery on par with thrillers like "Silence of the Lambs" or "Se7en," *Skinwalker* follows FBI Special Agent Greg Haworth, a no-nonsense "blue flamer" ("An actual FBI term for someone who moves up the ladder so fast, they've got flames shooting out of their ass," laughs DeFilippis) who's addicted to promotion within the bureau. While investigating his missing former partner, Haworth soon teams up with reluctant Navajo Tribal Police officer Ann Adakai, a woman torn between her duty as an officer of the law and the sacred traditions of her people.

"With Adakai, we wanted to play up the 'small town sheriff' archetype," explains DeFilippis. "We also wanted to have her caught between two worlds—trying to be a cop but trying to be a Navajo at the same time."

During Haworth and Adakai's investigation, they stumble across a murder scene unlike any they've ever witnessed: a corpse missing the largest organ on the human body (that's the skin, for all of you who failed Biology). With the skin flawlessly removed with near-surgical precision, Adakai realizes that they're not only dealing with a killer, but a practitioner of the ancient Navajo ritual known as skinwalking (in which a person would kill an animal, skin it and then wear its skin,

CULTURE SHOCK A headstrong cop and an ambitious FBI agent combat a killer and cultural taboos in *Skinwalker*.

So I decided to check the wastebasket.
THEN THE GUY BUYS ALL THIS MEDICATION. COLDEZE AND VITAMIN C. YOU NAME IT...
AGENT CALLINAN... YOU MIGHT WANT TO SEE THIS.
AGENT HAWORTH, IS THAT...?
YEAH, THAT'S FORSYTHE.

FLESHING OUT Stay outta rest-stop bathrooms. The elusive skin-wearing serial killer leaves the husk of his victims behind after it begins to deteriorate.

believing that it gave them the animal's powers and memories).

From that point on, the twists come faster than Chubby Checker on speed, as Haworth and Adakai realize that not only has the killer begun a cross-country murdering spree, but he's jumping from skin to skin on a daily basis, adopting the appearance of each person he kills.

While DeFilippis and Weir's résumé spans a wide variety of story genres (ranging from cartoons to superhero comics such as their upcoming run on Marvel's Tsunami title *New Mutants*), it's clear that they have a knack for penning captivating thrillers. After reading *Skinwalker*, I'm now counting the days until their follow-up Oni story, *Three Strikes*, hits stands in April.

In the all-new *Skinwalker* trade, Oni has pulled out all of the stops, giving fans a plethora of DVD-like extras, including a behind-the-scenes look at the production process, page breaks and anecdotes by Hurtt, and a never-before-seen five-page prequel story!

If you're a fan of thrillers, the *Skinwalker* trade belongs on your bookshelf (or even with your DVDs). After all, if the creators can shatter cultural taboos by writing *Skinwalker*, the least you can do is check it out. Unless, of course, you're thin-skinned.

THE LAST WORD A thriller on par with anything Hollywood has produced in the past decade with clever twists that leave a roller coaster jealous make *Skinwalker* a must read. Run, don't "walk" to your local comic shop and snag the trade now! ■ **CASEY SELIAS**

WANNA PICK THIS SERIES UP?

Call **1-888-COMIC-BOOK** to locate your nearest comic shop, or visit **www.onipress.com**. Wanna see your favorite indy title get some press? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY, 10920, or drop us an e-mail at **secretstash@wizarduniverse.com**.

HIDE 'N' SEEK

TRACK THESE BABIES DOWN

Does *Skinwalker* sound like a winner? Then why not check these titles out? All items ship in April unless otherwise noted.

A LEGACY BEGINS It usually takes time in order to achieve "legacy" status, but that's not the case for Legacy Entertainment.

The folks over at Legacy kicked off 2003 with an all-new anthology titled *American Pride*, a tribute book featuring stories and pin-ups based on the tragic events of September 11. Lending their help to the tribute book (with all proceeds going to the Picture the Homeless Foundation) is a host of talent from Legacy's "A Creator's Co-op" team, including Ed Davis (Triumph Comics), Andy Tom (Atom Strange Graphics) and Steve Vasquez (*Visage: Fallout*).

Arriving this April, fans can check out the fourth chapter of Legacy's *Uprising* anthology, featuring up-and-coming creators getting a chance to showcase their stories. Be sure to pick 'em up! *American Pride*, $2.99. *Uprising* #4, $12.95. Write to **legacycoop@hotmail.com** for more info.

MONKEYS + ROBOTS = PERFECT COMIC: Rejoice! An all-new chapter of James Kochalka's epic *Monkey vs. Robot*, titled *Monkey vs. Robot 2: The Crystal of Power*, hits stands in April. Who cares what it's about? As long as it has monkeys and robots slugging it out, we're happy. $14.95. **www.topshelfcomix.com**.

TOKE THAT, EVIL DOERS! It's an all-out attack on suburban America in Mat Brinkman's *Teratoid Heights* (right). Told through the eyes of a stoned teenager, find out how video games and basic-cable nature shows can be used as weapons when waging a war against small-town USA. $12.95. **www.highwaterbooks.com**

FRANKIE'S ANGELS Let's be honest: Despite the fact that they're only comic characters, Frank Cho can draw some really hot chicks! That said, be sure to pick up the *Frank Cho Illustrator*, showcasing Cho's talents for rendering lovely ladies...and reminding all of us that we're dateless losers. Sigh... $19.95. **www.insightstudiosgroup.com**

INDY INVASION! The indy invasion into the mainstream continues! Be sure to check out DC's *Beware the Creeper*, written by *Pistolwhip* co-writer Jason Hall, and Marvel's new Tsunami line, with scribes such as Andi Watson (*Breakfast Afternoon*) co-writing *Namor*, Sean McKeever (*The Waiting Place*) on *Sentinel* and Nunzio DeFilippis and Christina Weir (you just finished readin' about 'em) on the upcoming *New Mutants*. ■ **CS**

FOUR'S COMPANY

10th Anniversary Image HC enters fourth printing

For Image Comics, good things always come in fours. The Image Comics 10th anniversary commemorative hardcover, originally set for release in February 2002 and featuring new stories by the Fab Four quartet of remaining Image founders, has gone back to the presses for an unprecedented *fourth* printing. The book includes a Savage Dragon origin story by Erik Larsen, a CyberForce reunion by Marc Silvestri, a new Shadowhawk tale by Jim Valentino and the first new Spawn story in five years to be penciled by creator Todd McFarlane.

Even though no actual printings of the book have shipped to stores as of press time, retailers are applauding the risky publishing decision to forge ahead with a fourth round of copies. "Image Comics changed the whole industry," said Timothy Harrison of Tim's Comic Bin in Manhattan, N.Y. "It's only fitting that they celebrate their 10th anniversary, give or take a year, in a very unique way."

Although retailer Byron Nally, owner of comic shop Boxing Glove Arrow in Dayton, Ohio, wishes Image would "hurry up and release the first damn printing," he admits that four entire printings of a still-to-be-released book is a bold move.

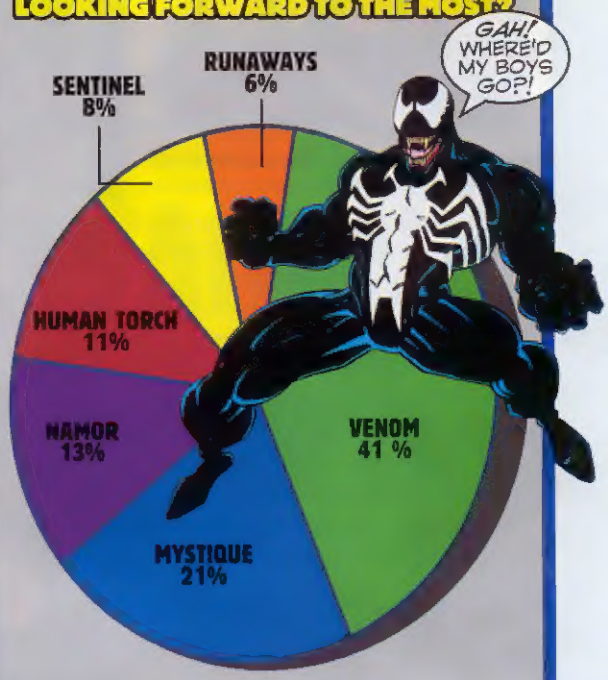
"Image always did things big, whether it was innovative new characters, multiple covers or chromium this or that," Nally gushed. "The fact that we still haven't seen jack in the way of a first printing and now a fourth is on the way, that's gutsy. They're walking a tightrope, for sure. You've got to applaud them."

All four of the remaining Image founders were unavailable for comment. ■ **TOM ROOT**

LINEBYLINE

BREAK IT DOWN NOW!

WHICH OF MARVEL'S WAVE 1 TSUNAMI BOOKS ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?



Based on results from a WizardUniverse reader poll from February 2003. For more great polls and the latest comic news, visit **www.wizarduniverse.com!**

UPS & DOWNS

ANNIVERSARY ISSUES It's a good time to be double-sized. February's jumbo *Incredible Hulk* #50 (featuring the return of the Abomination and the debut of artist Mike Deodato) rose 14 slots on the charts, while the upsized *Action Comics* #800 climbed 15 slots.

MARVEL MUST-HAVES Until recently, Marvel's bargain-priced reprint editions never seemed to realize their potential. Either fans didn't care about the material collected or the Must-Have came out long after the hype of the original book died down. That all changed with the Marvel Must-Have reprint of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #33-#36, the first four parts of the Venom storyline. Retailers ordered it heavily to please readers who can't afford the expensive single issues.

LADY DEATH Despite the controversial final days of Chaos! Comics, CrossGen's relaunched *Lady Death* #1 slew its way to the No. 69 slot on the February sales chart, the highest ranking any CrossGen book has obtained in the company's three years of existence! No pigmentation still does a world of good, apparently.

ULTIMATE DD & ELEKTRA Could trade paperback mania finally be getting out of control? The week after *Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra* #4 hit comic shops, Marvel rushed out a trade paperback collecting the entire four-issue mini-series, thereby killing any back-market interest the individual issues could have garnered.

ASTRO CITY After a three-year absence, Kurt Busiek's *Astro City* proves it still has sales legs, boasting an impressive comeback with the first issue of the new *Local Heroes* mini-series clocking in at No. 33.

WAID/RINGO FANTASTIC FOUR Marvel's nine-cent *FF* #60 gamble seems to have paid off, as back issues of the Mark Waid/Mike Wieringo *Fantastic Four* run (well, saved for #60, still available by the bazillions) have seen a slight price hike. Expect the current Dr. Doom arc to increase the World's Greatest demand.

THE HOTSEAT

This Month Featuring:

BRUCE WAYNE

WIZARD tracks down Batman's alter-ego—or at least the only one we could find in a phone book—hiding out in suburban Alabama...

WIZARD: Mr. Bruce Wayne, please.

WAYNE: Speaking, can I help you?

Bruce, how's the cape and cowl hanging?

[*Laughs*] Yeah, I get that a lot. Who's this?

Never mind who this is, Dark Knight. Let's just say, it's a friend.

Is this Bobby?

No, I assure you, my name is not Bobby. I knew a Bobby once and he was a d--k.

[*Chuckles*] Really, what's this all about? I'm kind of busy.

Busy fighting crime?

No, I'm in college.

Taking some criminal psychology courses, no doubt...

Actually, I'm a medical student.

Dr. Batman, that's pretty cool. You know, the Scarecrow's a doctor too...oh, and so is Harley Quinn!

Who?

Ah, that oafish, billionaire playboy exterior ain't fooling me. Who would you say has been your toughest adversary over the years?

I had a really tough chem lab last week.

Was there a fight?

No, but I thought about kicking my lab partner's ass. He didn't do the reading.

Partner's always letting you down, huh?

Totally.

Especially that Jason Todd kid, right?

I don't think I have any classes with him.

I bet the Batmobile is a chick magnet on campus.

I ride a bike to class.

The Bat-bike?

No, it's a 10-speed.

■ MIKE COTTON

Bat-bike courtesy Everett Collection; Bruce Wayne courtesy Pachamovie.